

Steven Bankler, CPA Client Spotlight



When Ed Lauterstein started 1st Choice Heating and Air Conditioning Company in 1991, his first customers were local homebuilders. As the company grew, it laid the foundation for what would become a family of companies serving a variety of clients across a broader marketplace.

Today, the 1st Choice organization consists of three mutually supportive but distinct operations: 1st Choice Heating and Air Conditioning, 1st Choice Restaurant Equipment and Supply, and 1st Choice Leasing. Still serving residential customers, 1st Choice also has garnered the likes of national fast-food chains, including McDonalds, and multi-billion-dollar commercial development and construction companies, including Aerial Texas Star, as clients. While the bulk of its business stems from residential customers located within the San Antonio metro area, the companies' commercial market extends as far south as Del Rio and as far north as Marble Falls and Burnet.

As the organization grew, Ed's son, David, joined 1st Choice as partner and vice president in 2005. Under Ed's direction, David diversified the heating and air-conditioning company by adding commercial HVAC services to its portfolio. Then in 2006, Ed rolled out the restaurant and equipment-leasing divisions, and hired managerial experts in these respective industries to help grow the new operations.

Currently a \$4 million company, 1st Choice Heating and Air Conditioning is licensed to sell and service all brands of residential and commercial heating and air conditioners. It also is qualified to improve the air quality of indoor environments, such as the installation of high-efficiency air filtration systems and anti-bacterial UV lights.

Also approaching the \$4 million mark, 1st Choice Restaurant Equipment and Supply, led by partner and vice president Seth Rosborough, repairs all types of restaurant equipment. "We can even do custom fabrication by partnering with others in the industry," says Seth. While its top customers are school districts, other clients are hospital systems, nursing homes, correctional facilities, and hotels and restaurants, including Luciano's and Sea Island.

Completing the trio, 1st Choice Leasing rents refrigerators and ice machines to commercial customers, and services beverage cooling and dispensing systems.

Prior to becoming an air-conditioning contractor and restaurant equipment and supply dealer, Ed successfully built and sold numerous businesses in related industries. Reflecting upon a 40-year career in service-related business thus far, Ed credits his success to consistent attention to customer service.

"Providing quality products at a fair price backed by service has been central to how we do and grow our business," Ed says. "We are hard-working, honest and professional people who understand the principle of sowing and reaping: If we treat our customers fairly, they'll keep coming back."

The triad of 1st Choice companies employs 37 people, the majority of whom are experienced technicians who are unique in their field: 1st Choice technicians are cross-trained in

multiple areas of expertise. "Our staff who service HVAC equipment also can service refrigeration and restaurant equipment as well as the equipment we lease," Ed says. "We also have a special group of technicians who work on cooking or 'hot' equipment in particular."

Rounding out the 1st Choice organization is a collaborative, proficient team that provides sales, dispatch, accounting, and design and CAD drafting support to all three operations.

Ed and Steven have been friends since childhood. Five years ago, 1st Choice chose Steven Bankler as its CPA. Steven handles the accounting for the organization, including for the internal employee payroll and benefits company, LautCo Management. He also assists Ed with his personal taxes and provides him with tax-related financial advice.

"Steve's accessibility and competence makes him invaluable to us," Ed says. "He's always there when I call, and when he's away, I trust his staff completely. Steve has a creative mind. He ensures that we pay only what is fair and in compliance with the law. Other CPAs may not be aware of every single thing available to us, but Steve is."

1st Choice Companies is located in San Antonio at 6884 Alamo Downs Parkway. Find out more by calling (210) 225-3033 or visit www.1stchoicecompanies.com.

