

# AUSTIN BUSINESS JOURNAL

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2007 ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

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BRETT BUCHANAN / ABJ

Most of Intertech Flooring's 15 original employees from 1988 still remain with the company, CEO Bill Imhoff says.



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**Winner**

**Bill Imhoff**  
Intertech Flooring

## STARTING ON THE GROUND FLOOR

When his employer went under, Bill Imhoff built a new company from the ashes

STACY STROUD | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**B**ill Imhoff has built a company where everybody has a say. Imhoff believes at Intertech Flooring — from the guy who sweeps the floors to the project manager — is qualified to voice an educated opinion. By hiring from the ground up and training and promoting from within, Intertech makes sure that the quality and safety of each project is consistent, he says.

Imhoff is most proud of the strong company culture that has evolved as a result of the high investment Intertech makes in each employee. He is dedicated to workforce development, and has structured his company so that opportunities for advancement are virtually unlimited — something almost unheard of today, when the average worker's tenure at most companies is just over four years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

One of Intertech's lead production managers, for instance, started out sweeping floors 17 years ago. And that's not an uncommon story at Intertech: most in the company started out as installers — even the managers.

In 1994, Imhoff decided to turn Intertech's paid training into a three-year certification program through which inexperienced workers could learn job skills' and earn credits toward a college degree, creating the foundation for a lifelong career. The result was an apprenticeship program for certified flooring mechanics.

Imhoff collaborated on the curriculum with Austin Community College and St. Phillip's College in San Antonio and graduate students at the University of Texas developed the text for the course as a class project.

Apprentices learn everything from

flooring installation procedures to project management. While enrolled, they receive full benefits and pay increases as they progress.

Realizing that 70 to 80 percent of high school graduates in Texas either don't go to college or don't make it past freshman first year, Imhoff is working to connect more high school students to Intertech's program. As chairman of Worksource, he is dedicated to helping develop the Texas workforce — especially young workers who need a head start.

"I think our success as a company has a lot to do with how we start people out," says Imhoff. "And we try to make decisions on a group level. It keeps us grounded about the real needs of our business."

A native tan with a family heritage of small-business ownership, Imhoff exemplifies the pay-it-forward philosophy

by passing on to others the support he has received and the lessons he has learned from years in the business.

Intertech Flooring was founded in 1988 via a combination of CEO Bill Imhoff's entrepreneurial drive and the support of a city with a community spirit.

"People really want people to succeed in Austin," says Imhoff.

He started Intertech Flooring when Carpet Resources, where he'd worked his way up to division manager, went under during a recession.

Left with a barely begun project — 3M's Austin office — and the choice of going to work for a competitor or starting his own venture, Imhoff chose "Door No. 2" and received overwhelming support from 3M and other Austin businesses that wanted to see his small company succeed.

He put everything he had into the busi-

ness, and it wasn't easy. His wife was going to law school and, at the time, bank loans weren't easily secured.

Of the 15 people employed at Intertech Flooring in 1988, most are still with the company, which has grown to more than 150 employees and has spread to San Antonio and South Texas.

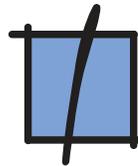
Intertech Flooring is now ranked 18th among commercial flooring companies nationwide, boasts the only apprenticeship program of its kind in the floor covering industry, and is a founding member of StarNet, a consumer-oriented national network of independent commercial flooring dealers.

Intertech provides commercial flooring products, installation, maintenance and design consultation to its clients, which have included Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, the city of Aus-

tin (city hall), Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corp. and the University of Texas. From the beginning of a project, Intertech works with the architects and the client to make sure that the right product is chosen, installed and maintained properly — using its own staff, not subcontractors.

And a lot of companies talk big about sustainability these days. Impressively, Intertech has been leading the charge for green building since the early '90s, and the initiative shows: its work on the city of Austin municipal complex helped the city earn LEED Gold Certification, and the Dell children's hospital "will be the first LEED Platinum-certified hospital in the world. But as Intertech exemplifies, sustainability isn't just about the environment. It's about investing in resources — planet and people — today, and improving their path to a better future, Imhoff says.

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# Intertech®

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