



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA ITEM REPORT

Requested Board Meeting Date: December 15, 2015

Title: Presentation of the 2015 Pima County Small Business Commission's Small Business of the Year Awards

Introduction/Background:

The Pima County Small Business Commission has presented the Pima County Small Business of the Year Awards since 2010. Nominations are received community-wide and the final selection of winners is made by the Commission. Awards are given to an urban small business and a rural small business. The urban award-winning business must be located within the city limits of Tucson. Rural winners are selected from any rural or small community outside the city limits of Tucson. Nominees must be located in Pima County and have no more than 100 employees.

Discussion:

At its October 15, 2015 public meeting, the Pima County Small Business Commission selected Aztera LLC as the Urban Small Business of the Year and Bling by Design, located in Vail, as the Rural Small Business of the Year. Each business will receive a plaque and a check for \$500.

Conclusion:

Pima County believes the awards serve to bring recognition and publicity to small businesses in the community. Small businesses are engines of the local economy, important job creators and serve a vital role in public affairs in Pima County.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors present the 2015 Pima County Small Business Commission Small Business of the Year Awards to Aztera LLC and Bling by Design.

Fiscal Impact:

\$1,000.00 (Community and Economic Development Administration)

Board of Supervisor District:

1 2 3 4 5 All

Department: Economic Development and Tourism Telephone: 724-3296

Department Director Signature/Date: Thomas R. Moulton 11/30/15

Deputy County Administrator Signature/Date: J. Miller 12/1/15

County Administrator Signature/Date: C. R. Buckley 12/1/15



PIMA COUNTY SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION
2015 Small Business of the Year Award

Eligibility Guidelines:

1. Must be located in Pima County (may be a branch or division of a larger business.)
2. Manager or owner must live in Pima County.
3. Less than 100 employees.
4. Must have been in operation for 2 (two) or more years.
5. An Award and \$500.00 prize will be given to both an Urban Small Business and a Rural Small Business in Pima County. Urban being defined as within Tucson City limits and Rural being defined as small/rural communities and cities outside the Tucson City limits.

Name of Company: Aztera, LLC

Address: 2102 N. Forbes Blvd, Suite 101, Tucson, AZ, 85741

CEO: Manny Teran

Contact Name: Eric Smith

Contact Phone: [REDACTED]

Contact E-Mail: eric.smith@aztera.com

Number of Employees: 20

Number of Years in Business: 5

PLEASE ATTACH: Support Material: These should be submitted in paragraph form:

1. Brief Company History (200 words or less)
 - Inspiration for starting the business
 - Product or Service offered
 - Market segment(s) served by the business
2. Positive Impact on Pima County (400 words or less)
 - Indicate specific ways the business has made the lives of those in your market segment better
3. Company merits for this award (400 words or less)
 - Indicate why you believe the company should be "The Small Business of the Year"
4. Testimonials (100 words each from up to two (2) current employees and/or two (2) current customers)

Submit nomination by mail, fax or e-mail to;

Aurora Hernandez, Project Assistant
Pima County Small Business Commission
33 N. Stone Ave., Suite 830
Tucson, AZ 85701
E-mail: Aurora.hernandez@pima.gov
Phone: 520.724.7356
Fax: 520.724.7358

Deadline: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2015 5:00 P.M.

For questions about the nomination process, contact: Lucretia Free @520-490-0654

Winner will be announced at the Board of Supervisors meeting at 130 W. Congress Street, Tucson, AZ.
Finalists and semi-finalists will be notified approximately 1-2 weeks prior.

Brief Company History (200 words or less)

- **Inspiration for starting the business**
- **Product or Service offered**
- **Market segments (s) served by the business**

There was an overwhelming lack of engineering support in Tucson that concentrated on customer-focused technology development. Companies who purchased equipment had to find a way to customize it to their needs. This was inefficient, inconvenient, and diverted resources away from the business' primary focus. The need for a customer-focused technology development firm led Manny Teran to start Aztera.

Aztera is a technology development firm composed of multidisciplinary engineering backgrounds and a talented business development team. Our team of mechanical, electrical, and software engineers work with early, growing, and mature companies to develop novel technologies, build functional prototypes, and create robust test equipment. Simply put: we make technology work.

Aztera has achieved a great deal working with local startups as well as fortune 50 companies. Startups do not have the capabilities to have a full-service engineering team on staff. This is where Aztera comes in; we have been the engineering branch of many startups, allowing them to put their focus into other areas. Aztera has also accomplished this with large organizations that do not have the time or flexibility to complete all of their projects.

Positive Impact on Pima County (400 words or less)

- **Indicate specific ways the business has made the lives of those in your market segment better**

At Aztera, we don't just support the success of our customers; we're also committed to the success of our community. With over 90% of our team members being Tucson natives or University of Arizona alumni, our commitment to community involvement is personal.

In addition to regularly sponsoring educational opportunities, judging competitions, and participating in entrepreneurial events, this year we're unveiling Aztera Cares, a quarterly outreach effort that will allow us to apply our specialized expertise toward projects that make Tucson even greater. Our first Aztera Cares effort was Habitat for the Humanity "A Brush With Kindness" program, where we helped restore a home. Recently we constructed a molecule structure that is sitting above the front desk of the Children's Museum of Oro Valley, where over half of the cost of engineering was donated.

Aztera is on the planning committee for Tucson's annual Idea Funding Conference as panelists, moderators, MCs, and judges. Aztera has two members on the board of the Tucson Manufacturing Group, which promotes local manufacturing, and members on committee with the Metropolitan Pima Alliance committees. We are Metro Chamber investors and have an A+ with the local BBB.

Aztera has a partnership with the University of Arizona commercialization branch Tech Launch Arizona. We were selected to represent the City's hand in commercialization of UA technologies. We are helping faculty inventions and discoveries to make it successfully to license or startup through the development of TLA's domain expert network and leading their ecosystem effort to connect small businesses with necessary resources for increased success in winning non-dilutive government awards

Aztera has outgrown our current location and need to expand. We have located a property that suits our needs and are working to move forward with the purchase and improvements. We have a detailed plan for slow expansion physically throughout the space, as the business grows. We are taking a public building at the corridor of the University and making it a presentable representation of the entrepreneurial technology development sector of Tucson. This new building will allow Aztera to continue to grow and need to hire more engineers and business students, which in turn will keep skilled workers in the Tucson area.

Company merits for this award (400 words or less)

- **Indicate why you believe the company should be "The Small Business of the Year"**

Aztera deserves the "Small Business of the Year" award because of all the work we do for our entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs come to Aztera for various engineering needs. Whether they need mechanical, electrical, or software engineering help, we are there to provide any assistance necessary. Most times our team will build the initial prototype for our entrepreneurs to demonstrate at tradeshows or investment meetings. The prototypes are fully functional for our entrepreneurs and everything we create and build for them belongs solely to them. Sometimes our entrepreneurs need us to make adjustments to prototypes they have already built, or improve on a design. Our engineers excel at creating designs from scratch, or helping our entrepreneurs implement updates to their ideas.

Aztera provides more support than just building and designing entrepreneurs ideas. We use our extensive network to put our entrepreneurs in contact with local and/or large-scale manufacturers. Aztera also belongs to the Tucson Manufacturing Group, a local network of non-competing companies who help start-ups and entrepreneurs learn about the manufacturing and engineering services available in Tucson, and we introduce our entrepreneurs to other companies depending on their needs.

What makes Aztera unique in how we work with our entrepreneurs is our focus on commercializing the product. We do not simply engineer prototypes, but we use our commercialization experience to challenge our customers on the marketability of their ideas. Aztera also has a fully staffed business team dedicated to new venture development. This includes extensive market research to determine where the product would be launched. Development of a business plan, marketing plan, and investment packages allowing for the entrepreneur to be fully prepared to gain capital investment.

Aztera strives to provide entrepreneurs all the assistance they need to take their product from an idea to a fully commercialized product.

Testimonials (100 words each from up to two (2) current employees and/or two (2) current customers)

Aztera:

- Eric, Business Development Manager
 - At Aztera, I have the ability to follow my passion: making connections for entrepreneurs to help them further reach their goals. I feel that I am making an impact in this community and the vehicle by which to do this has been through working for this company. The culture is also something special as the team has been able to accomplish large technology advancements for our customers while still coming together socially, whether it be through our weekly lunch potluck or our work in the community. Aztera is my home, and the team has quickly become my second family.
- Sean Whitsitt, Research Leader, Senior Software Engineer II
 - Nine months ago Aztera was one of many competing job offers that I had. Now it is my home family. Manny Teran offered me something that none of the other companies could: opportunity for personal and professional growth. I was hired to develop software applications and now I am in the process of creating a research and development department. I've been able to bring Aztera into the world of SBIRs and bring in a \$100,000 contract, all because Aztera encouraged and enabled me. Aztera is the kind of company where employees can be what they want to be.

Customers:

Tech Launch Arizona:

- Jen Watson, Associate, Technology Commercialization (This view reflects Jen Watson and not the University of Arizona)
 - Through my position at Tech Launch Arizona (TLA), I have worked with Aztera since 2013. Aztera took a lead role in developing a network of over 1300 people that we use to provide input on commercialization strategies for University technology. I continue to work with Aztera on TLA's Tech House program connecting local small businesses to resources aimed at building strategic teams, commercialization of innovative technologies and economic development. Aztera is deeply engaged with the surrounding business community, knowledgeable on the perspectives, needs and capabilities of their peers and has built a strong reputation for excellent teamwork.

Instant BioScan

- Candice Eaton, Applications Manager
 - As the applications manager at Instant BioScan I had the pleasure of working with Aztera on several projects over the past two years. Most notably they created and produced a sales demo video for our product. Of course we were in a time crunch and I was very impressed at how quickly they brought the whole project together. After a short meeting where I laid out our needs they quickly put together all of the necessary components to create a professional demo video. Working with Aztera has always been a real pleasure.



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Name of Company: Bling by Design

Address: Vail AZ

CEO: Sabrina Jarkowski

Contact Name: Sabrina Jarkowski

Contact Phone: [REDACTED]

Contact E-Mail: [REDACTED]

Number of Employees: 6

Number of Years in Business: 3 years

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BLING BY DESIGN

Brief Company History

Bling by Design first started making rhinestone shirts and went on to do vinyl and glitter including signs and banners. We currently screen print and have also recently purchased an embroidery machine. Bling by Design is now a full service custom shirt making company.

In my former role, I ran a marketing business. The great recession hit and I had to look for opportunities. I had an idea to get into sprucing up tee shirts after my friend told me she was selling her rhinestone machine. We shipped across the county and I learned from the ground up how to use it. Because of my marketing experience and connections from my other business, I began to slowly build a customer base and order started coming in. The rest is history!

I initially started off working with the women's market because that's what I knew. We have since moved on to cheerleading, dance, gymnastics. We are excited to now be an approved vendor for The Vail School District. The recent equipment purchases of screen printing and embroidery have opened up the market to virtually everyone.

Positive impact on Pima County

This might sound a little silly that a company like mine can impact a community...but we do! We offer full gear for cheerleading, dance and gymnastics teams. There are many single moms with children on the teams. Many of these moms have limited incomes and were paying very high prices before. I am able to provide shirts, shoes, jackets, warm ups, etc. at a reasonable price. Those children who in the past might not have been able to be on the teams because they couldn't afford it are now able to participate. They walking into competitions with their heads high, wearing top notch gear like all the other girls. This is very gratifying.

Company merits for this award

Of course when you own a business, you don't often think about this question. As I look back, I am reminded of how I knew nothing about this industry when I bought the rhinestone machine 3 years ago. I didn't know how to even use the equipment or where anything went. In the subsequent years, I have been able to turn this into a real business that supports my family and also helps the community. That makes me feel good about what I have accomplished.

Testimonials

Vicki S. (coach at Rincon University High School) Customer

I like the fact the business is local. So many in this industry are out of state. If you have a problem with warm up or any kind of gear, it is a complicated process. It typically involves shipping the merchandise back and then having it returned. This can take 6 to 12 weeks which is a lifetime when you have a

competition coming up. Because Blind by Design is local, they can respond immediately. Sabrina gets the best deals out there. Many of us live from pay check to paycheck and that helps the cost. She is very friendly and knowledgeable. I've really enjoyed working with her and appreciate that she knows what she is talking about, but is also not afraid to say she doesn't know how to do something. She has resources to find out if she doesn't have the answer and has hired a team that has full knowledge.

Chach Jackson (customer)

My experience has been that Bling by Design is able to produce one of a kind items that you can't find anywhere else. I love that I can call her and say I need something and she responds promptly. Sabrina is able to translate a customer's idea and turn it into a product quickly. She seems to take special care with customized orders from individuals and small groups because she really enjoys working with people closely and directly. Those same people become a walking and talking business card and referrals.

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