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## Magic brings them together

### Sons rejoin Dad's business after making their way in the world

By Brenda Bredahl

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When Ted Bauer's three sons were in high school, they all worked for their Dad's businesses, Laser Magic Inc. and Accumark Inc. in Hudson. Little did they know that it was Dad's dream to see all three eventually take a professional interest in his business.

While Andy and Eric Bauer said they preferred driving the delivery truck to local customers in the Twin Cities and western Wisconsin as youth, Scott Bauer said he liked working production when no one was around.

"I really liked cranking up the tunes and getting stuff done without interruption," said Scott, who graduated from Hudson High School in 1992.

None of the Bauer boys, however, gave much thought to staying with their father's business after graduating high school, and each went off to find their way in the world, and the business continued to evolve and grow for more than two decades.

Founded in 1985, Laser Magic offers CO2 and Yag laser marking as well as screen/pad printing for the advertising specialty, awards and incentives industry.

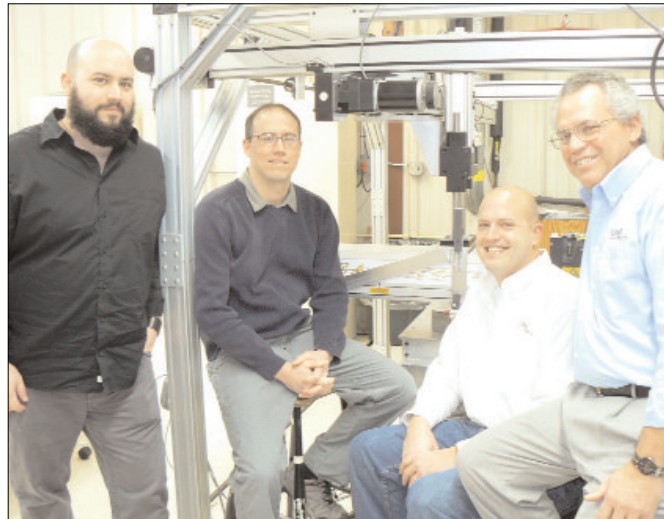
Accumark, founded in 1987, provides laser marking and product identification, bar coding and serialization for manufacturers in dozens of industries.

#### From snowboarding to punk rock

After high school, Scott studied business at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and then moved to Jackson Hole, Wyo., to pursue his passion of snowboarding. He starred in a couple of videos and films promoting the sport while working as a manager of a landscape company. There, he also met his wife, Kristen.

In 2005, Ted made an offer his son Scott couldn't refuse. Along with his wife, Scott came back to Wisconsin so he could join Laser Magic and Accumark as the production supervisor.

"For more than 23 years, Laser Magic and Accumark had, in some way, been part of our lives," Scott said. "It made sense to come back



Standing by their company's Yag laser gantry, which is used for engraving, are (from left) Andy Bauer, Scott Bauer, Eric Bauer, and their father, Ted Bauer. The Business News photo by Brenda Bredahl.

I'm surrounded by employees who are extremely skilled at what they do; this company has a great foundation. There is really a personal side to this opportunity, too, as I'm learning something new every day. And I know what it is like to have bad bosses, so I know I don't want to be one."

Andy, who graduated from Hudson High School in 1997, completed a degree in 3D animation at the Arts Institute International of Minnesota.

He then traveled to five continents, working various jobs, including at the McMurdo Research Station in Antarctica. In between stints, he toured North America with a barn-burning punk band, Amish Armada, which was covered by such noted music publications as Blender magazine.

Andy, who has a new band called "New Labor," which recently played Big V's in St. Paul, came back home to stay in 2008 and joined the companies as an art and graphics director.

He was recently programming the Yag laser to inscribe a sound mixing board for English art rockers, 10cc. "I've never heard of them," Andy said. Counters Ted, "They were big in the

1970s, before you were born."

The last of Bauer's three sons, Eric, came on board in January 2009 to work in sales and administration. A 1995 graduate of Hudson High School, Eric attended Vermillion Community College for natural resources and decided that he would stay put in the beautiful St. Croix Valley, but not to work for Dad. He loved the area and could pursue ample outdoor recreation with his wife, Tonya, and two sons, along the national scenic riverway.

"This area has everything — the river, hunting, fishing, the lakes, camping, boating, snowmobiling, skiing in the hills. I felt lucky to grow up around here," he said.

Eric worked in the construction industry for two large roofing contractors in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area for the past 12 years. At the end of 2008, he decided it was time for a change and that Laser Magic/Accumark was the best choice for his future.

#### Entrepreneurial spirit

While the sons have vastly different experiences, one thing that was evident is that they all had an entrepreneurial drive, Ted said. "Entrepreneurship is not necessarily just in

business, but it's an interest in life and a dedication and a passion to explore and to figure things out. These guys all have it," Ted said.

"It was the way we were raised," Eric said. "Our parents were driven, and we were too."

Recalls Andy: "Even when we were little, we had a Kool-Aid stand, and we used the money we made to buy baseball cards and pay our way into Valley Fair."

Eric said that his plan is to learn how things have worked in the company during the past 23 years and to not mess with success but to add a new perspective.

"My hope it to relieve my dad's workload in accounting, HR, and sales and learn how things have worked," Eric said. "The company's flourished, but I will provide a new perspective, almost looking from the outside in."

Ted said the future isn't without its challenges. "The big challenge is always to bring new customers to our workforce and devise plans for new markets. We also want to make sure we continue to bolster service to our existing customers in all sectors."

Business has been down in the ad specialty, awards and incentive industry that Laser Magic serves. "We've shifted some of our sales efforts to the Accumark side and medical manufacturing, so that is paying off," Ted said. "Plus we've increased customer service turnaround on both sides and have streamlined processes and increased efficiencies in all departments."

To meet anticipated growth and provide expanded capabilities, a new semi-automated multi-color rotary screen printer was just purchased. It can imprint round products, including plastic and metal medical devices, stainless industrial products, ceramics and other substances.

"Because it is designed to do multi-colors, it will allow us to imprint FDA and safety instructions on medical parts in addition to logos on advertising items," Ted said.

Eric said that strengthening communication with existing customers as well as new markets is key to maintaining successful relationships. He's been assisting the sales force with phone calls and site visits.

"Communication is really essential to the scope of our business, and you can't go overboard with it," he said. "Even if it's just an extra phone call to the customer saying your order will be shipped early or asking if they are happy with the order. It's really all about relationships."