

Dennis Jarrett (pictured on the right) and Pete Frese wanted the name of their franchise commercial cleaning company to portray where they want it to be—at the top. So they named the business **Stratus Building Solutions**.

“It’s a play on stratosphere,” Jarrett, the company’s CEO, explains. “There are other people that do things similar to us, but we wanted to be in the stratosphere, being at the top level from a quality standpoint. Stratus Building Solutions was just that. We wanted to be No. 1 in facility services for any type of customer in the commercial business.”

The name is proving prophetic. Although Jarrett and company president Frese founded the business only four years ago, Stratus garnered \$16 million in sales from January 1 through May 31 of this year. The company has 25 master franchise areas in 14 states and 1,000 sub-franchises. The co-owners expect the company to double in size by the end of this year.

Jarrett and Frese met when they were both executives at another franchise cleaning company. They quickly realized they had a lot in common. For instance, both of their wives are named Jennifer, and they both have three daughters who are close to the same ages.

But it also goes deeper than that.

“Both of us had an entrepreneurial urge,” Jarrett says. “We just felt like there was a tremendous void in this particular space where we could help people get into their own business, control their own destiny and everybody could benefit.”

The company offers 16 different franchise plans, which range from an initial investment of \$1,000 up to \$40,000. The low amount to enter will allow many to purchase a franchise, and Jarrett and Frese try to help franchise owners as much as possible.

“What we strive for is to really communicate with our franchise owners,” Frese says. “We constantly stay in touch with them and see what their needs are, and [we] adjust accordingly to meet those.”

At its Overland, Missouri, headquarters, the company has nine employees who work as trainers, salespeople, administrators and customer service representatives. Stratus has a unique way to keep its employees happy. “Everybody is under a commission plan or a bonus,” Jarrett says. “We pay for performance. We believe that at all levels, the better our employees do, the better that we do. So they have a base salary and goals and objectives. The idea was to create an entrepreneurial spirit or culture from top to bottom.”

To offer more to its customers and its franchise owners, the company launched **Stratus Affiliated Services** earlier this year. The offshoot offers additional commercial building maintenance services, which include landscaping, energy audits, pest control and recycling. The company plans to invest more than \$250,000 in Affiliated Services this year. It also expects to add five to six employees at the headquarters with the launch of the new venture. Even in a difficult economy, the founders expect business to stay strong. “When you look at a business, whether there’s a recession or the economy is good, that building needs to be cleaned,” Jarrett says, adding “whenever you have a fast-growth company, the challenge is to always provide the commitment that you did when you first started. So far, we’ve been able to achieve that.” **CEO**

INNOVATOR NEW HEIGHTS

STORY BY GINA PARSONS



SWEEPING SELECTION OF SERVICES

Stratus Affiliated Services debuted in select markets in July 2008. National availability to master franchisors starts later this year. Services include:

- Landscaping for corporate, commercial and industrial real estate, from grounds maintenance to “hard-scape” maintenance
- Energy audits and maintenance of building lighting systems, including internal and external lighting
- Recycling services, including pickup, removal and appropriate “green” disposal of paper, computer equipment, plastics and debris
- Hard-floor care for commercial, industrial and corporate buildings, and campuses
- Pest control services for commercial, industrial and corporate buildings, as well as campuses

Stratus Affiliated Services recently introduced a new program called “Stratus Sani-Proof” that kills bacteria, including methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), and germs found in schools, health clubs, daycare centers, gyms, dormitories, medical offices and hospitals.

In the franchise business, finding a new niche is like striking gold. The challenge is to keep the business fresh and proactive.

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