

Digitizing,
appliqué &
emblems



Art and Angela Berkowitz,
co-owners of Las Vegas-based
Creative Eye Embroidery

This Shop's Always On

BY SUSIE BRAMHALL
PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN MORRIS

Art Berkowitz has already run four miles on the treadmill, and at 7:12 a.m. pulls up to his favorite drive-through in Las Vegas and orders a 64 oz. Diet Coke. Before heading to Creative Eye Embroidery, which he co-owns with his wife, Angela, he drives up the strip to the Flamingo to watch the the all-night parties straggling back to hotels. While there's not much Vegas glitz in the shop, it's a profitable embroidery and digitizing business that, like Vegas, is always on and full of energy.

"Can you believe it?" says Art Berkowitz. "We actually started in a space one-third this size in my sister's garage with only one machine." It wasn't long, though, before the entrepreneurs hit on success and moved out of the garage and into their own space.

Now, in their current location, besides the office areas, they have two bay garages – one on either side of the office, giving them 2,500 square feet in total – plenty of room to house multiple machines, store supplies, receive merchandise and run a profitable business.

Prior to this, Art was involved in a family headwear manufacturing business; and in the '80s he was a rep for a cap importer. "At that time we contracted out all of our embroidery work," he says. "Then the first Tajima cap machines came out – it was a natural fit for us to buy them. Less than a month later, we were running two shifts and getting ready to buy another machine."

At that time, Art says, there wasn't much in the way of education in the industry. "We had to experiment and learn. I had some friends who also had a cap machine, so we'd talk every day as we figured things out," he says. "It was an exciting time. We felt like real pioneers."

About Creative Eye Embroidery Inc.

Owners: Art and Angela Berkowitz

Location: Las Vegas

Company founded: September 1998

2006 sales: \$473,000

Estimated 2007 sales: \$500,000-plus

Customer demographics: Distributors, screen-print manufacturers and other embroidery companies

Specific services offered: Contract embroidery for caps, shirts and bags, and in-house digitizing, appliqué and emblems

Secret to success: "We strive to offer the absolute best quality. We treat our employees and customers as if they were family. We stand behind all our work; we want to make our customer's customer look great."

Art Berkowitz, Creative Eye Embroidery Inc.

“Communication’s key to keeping customers happy. We insist on accurate information, so we strive to keep incredible records.”

Art Berkowitz, Creative Eye Embroidery Inc.



The Berkowitzes started out with a 12-color, six-head Tajima.



They later acquired two eight-head, 15-color and four single-head, 12-color machines.

A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Not original natives of the city known for its 24/7 bright lights, round-the-clock Elvis sightings, and all-you-can-eat buffets on what seems like every corner, Art and Angela Berkowitz moved to Las Vegas in September 1998. This was a new marketplace for their business, since they didn’t even have one customer.

“After some cold calls and visiting screen-printing shops, ASI distributors and many end-users, we realized there was a need for another pure contract embroidery house specializing in smaller production runs,” Art says. “At the time, many shops offered contract services, but also sold product, so they were also competitors with their own customers.”

The one thing Art’s company doesn’t do is house product for sale. And because of that, he can stay in business with higher profits. Plus, he’s able to keep a lower overhead, which allows him to be more competitive.

Now with eight-head machines facing each other, and several single-head machines in the same area, production’s separate from where work’s staged for production. The production area is a rainbow of high-end thread and fast machines.

“Our first machine was a Tajima six-head, 12-color machine,” Art says. “Now, we have two eight-head, 15-color Tajimas, our original six-head, 12-color machine, and four single-head, 12-color machines. Plus, we have one Universal laser cutter.”

With a shining reputation in the area, Art says he spends very little time cold calling. Most of his customers come from word of mouth. “We’re honest with our customers. Sometimes they don’t hear what they want to hear, but we tell them the truth about production time and capabilities,” he says. “Once we had a last-minute order for some T-shirts for a casino. Because the order had a large stitch count, it was going to take more time on the machine. So, the realistic turnaround time

for the order was an extra day. Because we were upfront with our distributor, he was able to let the end-user know the situation and they adjusted their schedule appropriately. Everyone was happy.”

Art isn’t shy about telling customers if their artwork won’t translate well into embroidery – and he shows them what will work.

At 10:26 a.m., Marian Hinebauch, owner of Las Vegas-based Shirtz, Logoz, & Promoz, bursts into the office, eager to do business for one of the schools she represents. “I’ve been doing business for five years, and in the beginning, I didn’t know Art,” she says. “But now I wouldn’t go anywhere else. He’s by far the best digitizer in the business.”

LUNCH AT THE PALMS

Art leaves his shop at 10:45 a.m. for an early lunch. Just after 11 a.m., he’s sitting with his friend, Jalapeño Jack at 24 Café at the Palms Resort and Casino. Palms owner George Maloof is sitting right across from their table. As the burgers and fries arrive at Art’s table, Harvey Blank from Las Vegas Apparel strolls by and compliments him on shipping a large apparel order ahead of schedule. Jalapeño Jack’s impressed.

Another Creative Eye customer, Dave Hopkins from Eagle Promotions, walks by and says hi. Now Art

Daily log

4:30 a.m.: Art Berkowitz goes to the gym to do four miles on the treadmill.

6:14 a.m.: Showers, shaves, eats breakfast, and feeds the dogs and cats.

7:09 a.m.: Gets mail at the post office, and then grabs a 64 oz. Diet Coke at a drive-through.

7:22 a.m.: Drives up the strip to the Flamingo to watch the “all-night parties limping to hotels.

7:42 a.m.: Arrives at work. Day crew (they start at 6 a.m.) is lined up to talk about production.

9:05 a.m.: Rush order called in for 55,000 stitches on 1,500 shirts.

1 a.m.: Dennis Cravero, owner of apparel distributor Vegas Threads, comes in to pick colors for 3-D foam T-shirts for Harrah’s Casinos.

11:05 a.m.: Meets Jalapeño Jack at 24 Café at the Palms Resort and Casino for lunch (sits across from Palms owner, George Maloof).

12:12 p.m.: Goes back to office to work on orders for the night crew.

1:27 p.m.: Stops at largest customer’s office to pick up orders.

1:59 p.m.: Returns to office just in time to get the night crew started (night crew starts at 2:00 p.m.).

2 p.m.-3 p.m.: Spends time in factory overseeing production for evening.

3:26 p.m.: Gets a phone call for a large quote for 654 shirts.

5 p.m.: Calls it a day in the office.

6 p.m.: Eats dinner with his wife, Angela, and heads out for a network meeting.

6:42 p.m.: Does a “30-second” commercial to pitch the business.

“Art and I complement each other and make a good team. We enjoy our time together, at work and at home. Not many couples can spend 24 hours a day together. We can.”

Angela Berkowitz, Creative Eye Embroidery Inc.



Creative Eye’s day crew starts work at 6 a.m.; the night crew starts at 2 p.m.



Art says his employees have close to 100 years of combined embroidery experience.

feels even more popular than Maloof. He orders lunch to go for his wife, who’s been busy all morning.

On the way back to the office, Angela calls twice with customer questions. One client needs a rush order of 36 shirts by Monday for a convention event. Art says, “Let’s do it.” But when his wife says there’s no artwork and the client needs an artist, he says, “Well, it looks like another late night.”

Around 1:30 p.m., Art leaves the office again to swing by his largest customer; he usually does a pickup and delivery every day. Digitizing five to 10 designs weekly, he makes time to meet with the artist to go over ideas that work great for screening, but not with embroidery.

Art gets back to the office a couple minutes shy of 2 p.m., with just enough time to transition to the night crew. Besides juggling the work for the evening, Angela is also taking care of two walk-in customers. The husband and wife team try to schedule longer-run orders for the evening. The eight-head machines are already booked for the night, with 500 pieces. The night operators get busy setting up everything on their own, and Art double-checks that he has some work set up for the morning crew, who start at 6 a.m.

“You know, we’ve had the same crew here for a long time,” he says of his seven full-time employees. “There’s no direct supervision in our factory. Everyone’s trained to load machines, read work orders and determine quality control. If an operator doesn’t like a thread color or the way something looks, he knows to stop the machine and ask questions.

Heading to the computer, Art reinforces what makes his company a success, in addition to his first-class customer service. “One of our advantages is our system. We’re able to auto-inform a customer of

his order’s production status,” he says. “We keep track of the style, sizes and colors from the order. That’s very helpful in many instances. For example, one of our largest customers, Tee Shirts of Nevada, was submitting a repeat order for one of their customers, the Metro Police Department. They needed to know the thread colors and actual cap colors used, and we were able to pull up all of their information with just a few clicks.”

In addition, Creative Eye’s invoicing system stores information that’s helpful in getting reorders; this information includes an image of the design that was run. “We have a lot of knowledge in our company,” Art says. “The combined embroidery experience in our factory is close to 100 years.”

Back at home around 6 p.m. Angela rushes around the kitchen whipping up a fast dinner. She does everything so quickly from spending 20 years as an emergency room nurse. Her husband feeds the dogs, and she stirs the chicken and vegetables.

The team’s not done working for the night. At 6:20 p.m., they gear up for their meeting with WorldVentures, a technology company that offers travel deals. At 6:32 p.m., they arrive at the meeting. Many of their customers are there. Art gets a “30-second commercial” about his embroidery business.

“Hi, I’m Art Berkowitz. My wife, Angela, and I own Creative Eye Embroidery here in town,” he says. “We can help you promote your business with embroidered shirts and caps. If you want to advertise in a more effective manner, we can help you get started. And, our company’s going to be featured in an industry publication called *Stitches*.”

As Art Berkowitz holds up a copy of *Stitches*, everyone applauds. Two people immediately come up to the Berkowitzes to learn more about their business.



An employee hoops a shirt in the staging area, which is separate from production.

SUSIE BRAMHALL is a contributing writer based in Las Vegas.