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## **Stryker Electric juiced about industry award**

**BYLINE: BILL CHURCH** BJ contributor

Palm City-based Stryker Electric is that company you hear about because it is both doing well financially and doing good for the community.

The electrical contractor is the Palm City Chamber of Commerce's representative for an Industry Appreciation Award to be given by the Martin County Business Development Board in mid-October. The company is being recognized for its long history of giving time, finances and expertise to a number of local organizations.

"Giving back to the community you serve is vital," said Scott B. Eccleston, who holds several titles at Stryker including chairman. He is one of five partners in the privately held company. "I say that to anyone getting into business."

The company donates to and Eccleston is personally involved in the American Red Cross, the Humane Society, the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center, Big Brothers Big Sisters and Caring Children, Clothing Children.

Eccleston credits the example set by company president and co-founder Michael G. Bryan.

"Our company has been rewarded because of his generosity to the community," Eccleston said.

The proof is in the financial numbers. Eccleston, 44, who directs the company's finances and administration, said that 2007 will be Stryker's best year ever despite the slowdown in the economy generally and the construction business specifically. The company is still operating on a backlog of multi-year contracts signed in previous years.

When Eccleston joined the company in 1993, Stryker had \$4 million in revenues. From 2005 to 2006, service revenues increased 40 percent.

Today, annual revenues total \$30 million, he said. Most of that comes from installing electrical wiring in buildings, primarily new construction.

More than half of revenues comes from institutional work, including schools, hospitals and correctional facilities. One of its major projects: construction of the new Palm Beach Gardens High School.

Another 35 percent of revenues comes from multi-family building construction, such as Jade Beach and Brickell on the River, high-rise condominiums in Miami-Dade County.

A small but growing portion of the business, which already accounts for the remaining 10 percent of revenues, is the service department. It does work for retailers such as Home Depot, WalMart and BJ's Wholesale Club.

Stryker serves customers from Indian River County to Miami-Dade County. The company once had an office in Charlotte, N.C. It closed, but the firm continues to serve existing clients in the Carolinas and Georgia.

At its current size, Stryker is geared for large projects, Eccleston said.

The company bids on projects worth \$3 million and up. The ideal job is worth between \$3 million and \$14 million.

Projects of that size keeps busy the company's 285 employees, 246 of which are electricians. Another 23 people work in the service department and 16 in administration.

Eccleston also has an apprenticeship program, which pays the total cost of sending any interested employee to Indian River Community College's four-year program leading to journeyman status.

"We want young people to know these are good jobs," Eccleston said. "Electricians can earn up to \$50,000 after about five years."

All employees are full time and their benefits include vacation time, medical, dental, life insurance and a company-matching 401(k) retirement program.

Stryker's has stayed busy in recent years with school construction projects from Martin County to Miami-Dade. With recent a downturn in school enrollment and cutbacks in funding, some school boards taking projects off the board, Eccleston said.

At the same time, capital for condo construction has begun to dry up.

Anticipating a slowdown, Stryker shrank its workforce over the past year or so. The company once had more than 400 workers and cut that to less than 300 through attrition. Company leaders also became more selective in choosing projects.

"We feel we shouldn't have to lay anybody off," Eccleston said. "We will continue to handle personnel levels through attrition if the market continues down."

Stryker has also trimmed back its office space. Eccleston opted to move all but administration personnel to the field.

"We need our guys on the job," Eccleston said. "I set up a compound for them at their sites. They take their vehicles home since they're on call 24 hours a day."

From 15,000 square feet at its old location in the Turnpike Industrial Park in Palm City, the company moved just last March to a new 4,800-square-foot facility in the Palm City Business Park on High Meadows Avenue. The company also maintains a small office in North Miami and three more at major job sites.

Stryker competes on the Treasure Coast primarily with Gerelco Electrical Contractors, a large company, and the smaller Fast Track and Arlington firms.

Brothers Joe and Michael Bryan founded Stryker in 1983 when they purchased the former Charter Electric.

They changed the name to Stryker because they liked the popular fishing boat of the same name. The company was based in Jupiter until 2000, when it moved to Palm City where both Bryan and Eccleston live. They also wanted to make the company more focused on the Treasure Coast.

Joe has retired but Michael, 64, a licensed electrician, remains active not just as president, but also as a field worker.

"He just wants to be out there with the guys, working alongside them," Eccleston said. "He's their leader, their mentor."

Eccleston joined Stryker in 1993 after an earlier career as a bartender and then in country club food and beverage management. Unfortunately, he says, his product got the best of him. A recovering alcoholic, he has been sober since 1990.

"I was lucky that I realized I had a problem at the young age of 26 when I could do something about it," Eccleston said.

He went on to earn his degree in accounting from Florida Atlantic University and worked his way up to his present leadership role at Stryker.

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