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SPIRIT *of* SMALL BUSINESS

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CONSTRUCTION



Joel's Roofing & Rain Gutter Co. owner Joel Grusinski takes to the rooftops with his fleet of bright white trucks and 10 employees.

Roof installer fights recession to come out on top

By Dana Olsen
Staff Writer

If you need work done on your roof, who you gonna call? Joel Grusinski.

As the owner of Joel's Roofing and Rain Gutter Co., Grusinski is the South Coast's go-to guy for installing roofs, rain gutter systems and sheet metal. Grusinski told the Business Times he's "definitely created his own niche in Santa Barbara for the roofing and rain gutter trade."

The 9-year-old company, located on West Gutierrez Street in Santa Barbara, currently has 10 staff members, six of whom are certified technicians in either the rain gutter or roofing divisions of the company. With a fleet of bright white trucks, large billboards in the region bearing the company's name, and a big neon sign at the business' main offices, Joel's Roofing and Rain Gutter Co. has become a prolific presence in Santa Barbara.

Grusinski, who was born and raised on the South Coast, has known from an early age that he wanted to become a business owner. He said that while most of his friends spent their early 20s traveling, he was more

JOEL'S ROOFING & RAIN GUTTER CO.

• Based: Santa Barbara

• Fun fact: Joel Grusinski, the owner, is also an avid piano player and composer.

interested in learning how to run a business in Santa Barbara. In the early 2000s, Grusinski moved to Florida to learn about the waterproofing trade. After working in the industry in Florida, he said he became "keenly aware that there was a void of this type of business in the Santa Barbara area."

When he returned to Santa Barbara, he found work at an established gutter company in the region until he was ready to set up shop on his own. In 2004, when Grusinski was 26 years old, he took on a partner and opened what was then known as Joel's Gutter Co. The business was successful from the start, installing sheet metal and rain gutter systems in a region that spanned from Ventura to the Santa Ynez Valley on both residential and commercial properties.

Grusinski recalls that the company expanded quickly at the beginning, becoming a top competitor in the region "seemingly overnight." But when the recession hit in 2007-08, business slowed, and Grusinski experienced the same problems as many small-business owners during that time. He was forced to lay off many of his employees, and he said he was "fighting to keep his doors open." One specific problem for business during that time period was that many roofing companies, in efforts to stay afloat during the recession, started to install gutter systems on homes.

As a result of the recession and increased competition in the gutter industry, Grusinski decided to expand his services.

In 2008, after breaking off with his business partner, he obtained a third license and added roofing to the company's offerings. Unlike some other similar companies, Grusinski and his technicians became certified in each roofing application product, making the company attractive to clients. He said he only hired the most experienced technicians to head up the business' roofing division. In 2012, the company's name officially changed to what it's known as today: Joel's Roofing

and Rain Gutter Co., with Grusinski as its sole owner.

"What I like about owning my own business is that I get to add my own creativity and spin to the trades that area always evolving," he told the Business Times. "I have a lot of fun going to trade shows and finding the best products out there to provide to my customers."

With the addition of roofing to its services, Grusinski's business is once again booming. Outside of work, he enjoys surfing and traveling — but running his own business doesn't leave much downtime.

Craig Saling of Santa Barbara Merchant Services, who has worked with Grusinski, nominated him for a Spirit of Small Business award. Saling said the company stands out from other similar companies because unlike some other construction-industry businesses, Grusinski has insurance that protects clients for many different things. "Construction was hit very hard this last couple years; however, Joel Grusinski has made it through," Saling said in the nomination. "He pays more to hire locals employees for the most part, and he retains a crew capable of completing the job within the week in most cases."