

ENDEAVORS

Building a business with snacks and smiles

By Matthew Sauer
STAFF WRITER

Josh and Lisa Leuchter take their family business a little farther than some.

Like most entrepreneurs, their business is their baby.

But the Leuchters also have raised two babies at their Manatee County vending machine operation, SNACKWORKS Inc. Michelle, 5, and Ethan, 18 months, spent their formulative months at the company in Lisa Leuchter's office/nursery.

The new baby is the Leuchter's dog, Buster.

Josh Leuchter, with a background in commercial real estate, and Lisa Leuchter, a former stockbroker and non-profit fundraiser, complement one another as business partners.

"The pluses far outweigh the negatives," Lisa Leuchter said. "It's a really good feeling because we have faith in what the other one is doing."

"I think it's very unique... For us, we just seem to be able to agree on the issues," her husband said. "It's a comfort when you have somebody here who is your spouse and also your most trusted friend."

Josh Leuchter's family bought

Profile

■ **Name:** SNACKWORKS Inc., 3109 59th Ave. Dr. E., Manatee County

■ **Ownership:** Josh and Lisa Leuchter

■ **When started:** 1990

■ **Services:** Vending machine services; corporate catering through sister business, CATERWORKS; wholesale coffee services to business and commissary service to the Sarasota County Jail

■ **Phone:** 751-3333

SNACKWORKS — then solely distributing Tom's snacks — in 1990. The Leuchters quickly found that arrangement limiting and decided to become independent.

SNACKWORKS sells for Frito-Lay, Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Austin Crackers and other big names in the vending industry. It has 900 machines in the field — about 65 percent owned by SNACKWORKS with the remainder given to them for use by the snacks companies because of the high volume they sell.

SNACKWORKS' customers



STAFF PHOTO/MATTHEW SAUER

Josh and Lisa Leuchter own Manatee County's SNACKWORKS Inc., a vending machine company.

are diverse. Its market stretches from Port Manatee to North Port. Customers include Doctors Hospital of Sarasota, Bon Secours Hospital in Venice, Staff Leasing Inc. in Bradenton, SecurityLink

from Ameritech in Manatee County, Bausch & Lomb in Manatee and Teleflex Inc. in Sarasota County.

The vending company employs 20 people, including four part-

time workers.

The Leuchters credit some of the business's stability to an experienced work force. Some employees have been with the business longer than Lisa Leuchter, who married her husband 6½ years ago. The couple is sensitive to workers' value, especially in the region's tight labor market.

"We make the decisions, but you can't do it without taking everyone into consideration," Josh Leuchter said.

With most competitors selling similar products, customer service also is key to the vending industry. "The difference is what you can bring to the customer," he said.

SNACKWORKS has been growing internally and through acquisitions. It recently bought a business that increased its delivery routes from five to seven.