

Rockford Register Star

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SNAPSHOT!

Fresh Coat

Owner/top executive: Michael Solberg, president and owner

Address: Belvidere

Telephone: 815-544-6999

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Opened: Aug. 10

Products and services: Interior and exterior commercial and residential paint jobs. Free in-home quotes, firm start dates and referral programs. We only hire experienced painters, and we use premium paints that are included in the price. There are no hidden fees. The quote you get is the price we charge. We also work with an interior designer and have a Realtor program.

Why did you get into this business? I've been in one aspect of construction or another since I was a kid. When I got out of the Marines, I came back to town in 1988. A friend of mine had a painting business on the side, and I ended up painting with him for six years. I went into the remodeling trade with a cousin and, from there, branched off doing fire and water damage restoration.

I had the opportunity to go to Chrysler, but I always loved working on people's homes. With the plant closing and all the transfers coming in, it pretty much bumped me out of the Chrysler job after 11 years, so I decided to take the buyout. I wanted to start a business again. I toyed with the idea of doing insurance work again, but then I started looking into franchises for fast food and other stores. I found Fresh Coat, and I loved the paint. It was an inexpensive startup cost, so I decided to contact them. And I fell in love with the company after a new-member orientation session, so I bought a franchise.

What advice can you offer others who are thinking of starting a business? Don't be afraid to do your research and find out what best works for you. Talk to others who are successful in business whom you look up to. Talk to them, get their advice. If you



MELISSA WESTPHAL | ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

Lloyd Evans, lead painter for Fresh Coat painting company in Belvidere, rolls paint on a wall in a Belvidere home.

find something you love, it's not a job. If you're not passionate, you can't share your product or your service.

How has your business grown since opening? We were extremely busy within the first two weeks of opening. We hired a second painter right away and just hired a third painter last week. That was one of the dreams I had with this business: to be able to hire people and give them a decent living, a means to support their family with a stable company.

Where do you see your business in the next five years? I'd like to have 20 painters working for me. It seems aggressive, but we have an aggressive marketing strategy. Our goal is to be the premier paint company in northern Illinois. People are investing more in their homes and staying where they're at longer, so they're looking for more personalization of their homes. We'll

go where the jobs are. In the short term, we'd like to add DeKalb County or Ogle County to our service area.

What is most satisfying about your business? It's always great to see people's faces when you've transformed their home into something they love. That's always been a big thing for me.

What is the biggest challenge about your business? Different problems you find with each house, like exterior wood rot or interior drywall defects. We don't just cover those. We try to fix the problem. My guys are skilled at matching textures, and that makes customers very happy.

— By Melissa Westphal

To nominate a business for Snapshot, send candidate's name, place of employment and phone number to Melissa Westphal, Rockford Register Star Business Desk, 99 E. State St., Rockford, IL 61104; fax 815-987-1365; e-mail mwestpha@rrstar.com.