

MARKING MILESTONES

Trophies always popular

■ A local trophy company is still going strong after 40 years, and the main reason is sentimental: People still want to be rewarded for a job well done.

BY BETH FEINSTEIN-BARTL
Special to The Miami Herald

When folks are in need of recognition, many go to Rick Cordary.

Through his company, EDCO Awards & Specialties, Cordary has turned pats on the back into a thriving livelihood.

Cordary is the man behind many of the plaques, trophies and ribbons distributed over the decades by local schools, businesses and charities.

"If there's an award hanging on a wall in Broward County, there's a 90 percent chance it's ours," said Cordary, whose company officially turned 40 in December.

The enterprise that made its mark celebrating the achievements of others is now marking its own milestone — one that takes on added importance in these tough economic times.

As businesses close and people hold on to their dollars with an ever-tightening grip, business at EDCO is still going strong in each of the four locations, at 3702 Davie Blvd. in Fort Lauderdale, 5634 Johnson St. in Hollywood, 1216 E. Atlantic Blvd. in Pompano Beach and 9815 W. Sample Rd. in Coral Springs.

The only glitch has been a minor 2 percent dip in sales, Cordary said.

There's good reason for EDCO's continued success. There's plenty of sentiment behind the thousands of engravings and etchings. For many, the lifelike sculptures of eagles perched with wings spread wide, medals decorated with wreaths of laurel leaves, golfers posed in mid-swing, crystal vases, wine decanters, perfume bottles



and clocks are priceless reminders.

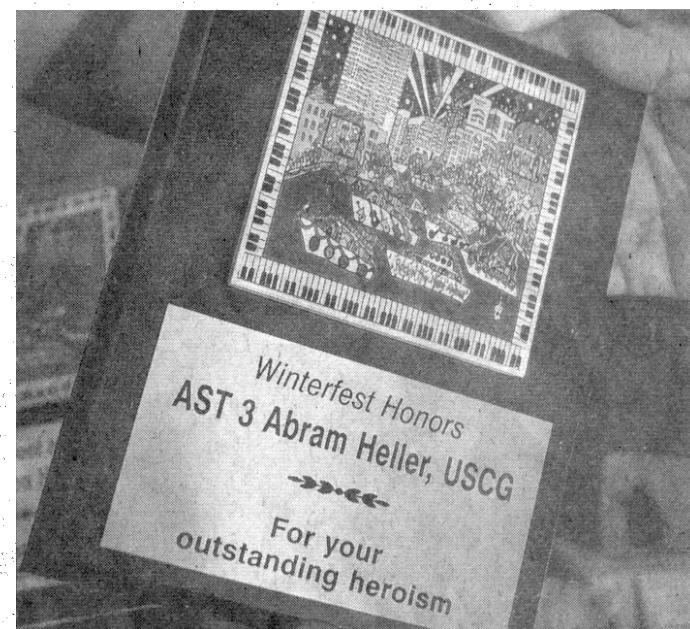
"Awards have not lost popularity," Cordary said. "People are down so much at this point, emotionally and financially, to be recognized for a job well done is worth more

now than ever before."

Cordary and his staff have pretty much done it all. There have been bunches of bowling trophies, batches of school science fair ribbons and several marriage proposals. The requests for accolades, affir-

mations and proclamations seem never-ending.

It's been that way ever since Cordary's mom, Faith, started the company on Dec. 8, 1968. Their first customer on that date, recorded in a treasured ledger Cordary still



PHOTOS BY EILEEN SOLER/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

REWARDING: EDCO Awards & Specialties, run by Richard Cordary, left, has been around 40 years, making plaques like the one shown above.

possesses, was a German shepherd dog club. Faith Cordary served as the club's trophy chairwoman, and it was her unsatisfying search for awards that turned the then-nurse into an entrepreneur.

"She stopped at two stores," Cordary said. "One was closed. The other threw a catalog at her. She was always a businesswoman at heart and saw a need."

Her first store opened on Ravenswood Road, in a small room at her husband Edward's company, EDCO Brush Manufacturing.

When Cordary's father sold his firm, which made industrial brooms and brushes, the trophy business moved to a rented space on Davie Boulevard. The family then purchased property along the same corridor and built the structure where the store has been operating for 35 years. Locations in Hollywood and Pompano Beach followed. The newest site, in Coral Springs, opened last year.

Cordary, 53, worked alongside his mother from his teens until she died three years ago. Over time, he has watched the company grow from \$400 its first month to \$5 million a year with 35 employees, including his stepson, Mike

Szczesny, who serves as vice president and part owner.

Cordary follows a formula of exposure, client satisfaction, affordable prices and diversification. EDCO puts its name on everything, from the bottom of its trophies to the Internet and e-mails, he said.

The company's inventory is extensive, too. "We started selling trophies and plaques, then we added ribbons, laser engraving, adding photos and other images on to the metal," he said.

Offering promotional products to companies such as banners, coffee mugs, pens, pencils, tote bags and T-shirts further added to EDCO's coffers, Cordary said.

The results are loyal customers like Patsy Mennuti, president of the Riverwalk Trust. EDCO has been working with the group for 15 years, engraving bricks sold to raise money for programs benefiting Riverwalk in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

The rectangular blocks, citing wedding anniversaries, birthdays, marriage proposals, memorials to loved ones and other sentiments, line the waterfront promenade.

"What they're doing represents a special milestone or an event," she said. "They're preserving memories."