

Meet 2020’s Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year

Ron Edwards knew he would start his own business one day, but the path to launching Santa Fe’s Focus Advertising Specialties was paved with a variety of jobs and small-business ventures.

The most influential of his early occupations was his overseas service in the Marines, Edwards said. Thirteen weeks in basic training and four years in the military “challenged me in different ways,” he said. “I learned that I can go further than I think I can.”

Working within fixed budgets also taught Edwards how to keep operations tight.

Those lessons in endurance and efficiency prepared him for the challenges of civilian life. Edwards started a wood-finishing business and restaurant in Crested Butte, Colo., and then moved to New Mexico. After suffering a debilitating back injury at a construction site in 2002, his days of working physically demanding jobs were over.

Three years later, Edwards and his wife, Kathryn, opened Focus Advertising to design and produce promotional products and logos for businesses, nonprofits, organizations and individuals. “We are in this to add value to your company,” he said. “We make products that have use and value — that people will remember you by. That (product) is your unspoken

approach to a person's life, so it better have quality."

Clients can bring their own logos and artwork for the products they want inscribed, or Edwards and his crew can produce or refine the artwork in house and send it to a vendor for finishing. This process takes weeks off the turnaround time typically involved in ordering directly from product vendors, he said.

As the business grew, Edwards needed capital to expand. In 2007, he approached a Santa Fe bank for a loan, but was told his business was too young and untested and had no inventory to put up for collateral.

The bank urged Edwards to contact The Loan Fund and helped set up a meeting with a loan officer from the nonprofit organization. Edwards secured a short-term loan and paid it back on time. It would be the first of several loans that The Loan Fund extended to support Focus Advertising's multiple expansions.

"They've always been there for us," Edwards said of The Loan Fund. "We love doing business with them; they are like a family."

Business grew steadily until 2018, when it boomed for a year. "We grew 33 percent that year," Edwards said. "But we lost a lot of business in the last six months with the pandemic."

The couple recently started a new company to produce biodegradable sanitary products for people with mobility limits, no permanent home, or concerns about using public restrooms.

This innovation ties in with another of Edwards' longtime passions: helping homeless veterans. In 2007, the entrepreneur, who is also a jazz pianist, wrote a song to highlight the problem, and two years later he performed "You Have Forgotten Me" at the Veterans Administration Stand Down event in Santa Fe.

In September, Edwards will receive the “2020 Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year” award from the U.S. Small Business Administration’s New Mexico District Office.

To learn more about Focus Advertising, go to focusadonline.com/

The Loan Fund is a nonprofit community development financial institution that serves small businesses in New Mexico. This year alone, The Loan Fund has provided nearly $6 million in loans to New Mexico businesses that have created or preserved more than 500 jobs. Visit loanfund.org/ for more information.

The Finance New Mexico project connects individuals and businesses with skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to FinanceNewMexico.org .

By Sandy Nelson
Finance New Mexico project