

2004  
New Jersey's

# Finest





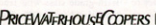



**E**ach year NJBIZ recognizes 26 private companies from across the state as New Jersey's Finest, based on the quality of their goods and services and the extent of their growth. The standout firms on the following pages are

builders, brokers and paperwork busters. They are companies like in-store advertiser FLOORgraphics, whose products anyone can see and walk on, and insurance data collector ISO, whose 9.3 billion records provide the statistical backbone for property and casualty underwriters around the world. Above all, they are companies that enrich the economy and improve the quality of life.

The business owners and executives shown here are a testament to the diversity of enterprise in the state. Some are immigrants, some are youthful, some are veterans of the business world. Several have advanced degrees; one is a college dropout. They all share a drive to work hard and innovate, and to make their companies the finest they can be.

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That was a key factor in keeping our head above water."

To compete with firms that outsource IT work to low-cost countries, Vision Systems strives to keep its own costs as low as possible. For example, he doesn't charge clients for overtime work. "The question," he says, "is how do we keep the work here and sustain it?"

Mandalapu doesn't doubt his ability to do that. He hopes to increase the company's workforce to 250 employees next year, and to reach \$18 million to \$20 million in revenue. Adds he: "Five years from now, I would like Vision Systems to be a \$50 million company."

| Varghese Joseph

### WOOD FLOORING INTERNATIONAL

## Gorgeous Floors to Walk On

**W**illiam Jopling has gone from college dropout to logger to CEO of a rapidly growing importer of exotic woods for floors. Wood Flooring International, Jopling's Delran

company, expects to nail down \$16 million in revenue this year by selling flooring made from woods like Brazilian cherry, Australian cypress and Asian teak. The company had revenue of \$14 million last year.

Jopling "knows the wood business like nobody else," says Joe Hughes, a buyer for distributor Derr Flooring in



Jopling launched his company with an SBA loan and a pocketful of industry contacts.

Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. "He spends a lot of time in Brazil and other places and watches the factories to make

sure they do what he orders."

Jopling, 52, departed the University of Vermont after three years to, as he puts it, "get my hands dirty." He became a logger, a sawmill hand and a construction worker.

In the mid-1970s Jopling opened a shop that provided architectural molding and millwork to Vermont ski lodges. He sold it 10 years later and traveled to Ghana to import exotic woods to North America. "Mostly that flooring went into the Port Liberte project," Jopling says, referring to a waterfront condominium development in Hoboken.

When Ghana went through a regime change, Jopling left the country and began importing woods from South America. In the 1990s, he teamed up with a Philadelphia importer to form a company called International Hardwood Flooring. In 1998 Jopling left the partnership and used credit cards to launch Wood Flooring International in Philadelphia. In 2001 the company moved across the Delaware River to Delran.

A \$50,000 Small Business Adminis-

tration Express loan and Jopling's contacts with flooring suppliers around the world helped him get the new company up and running. Jopling began by importing unfinished wood. Then, "over the last year," he says "we've evolved into more engineered, proprietary product lines." The company now has 35 employees and warehouses in Atlanta and Los Angeles.

Wood Flooring has capitalized on a shift away from traditional oak floors covered with a variety of stains and toward flooring with rich natural grains. The company's products are typically found in homes

priced at \$400,000 and up, and in tony shops like leather luggage retailer Louis Vuitton.

Jopling is still very much on the go. He travels regularly to the 15 countries that supply his company's woods to keep an eye on details. At home, the 6-foot 3-inch entrepreneur is an avid volleyball player. He and his wife Valerie have two children and are expecting a third. ■

| João-Pierre S. Ruth

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