

# **SMALL** Business Times

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## top10 winner: SMALL BUSINESSES of the year

# R&R Insurance

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PHOTO BY PAUL GAERTNER

**K**en Riesch wants to get bigger — not him, literally, otherwise he wouldn't fit into the leprechaun outfit he wears to the R&R Insurance Services St. Patrick's Day party every year. No, Riesch wants his company to keep growing by writing new business or acquiring more agencies.

It is the drive to improve, the continuous investment in employees, and the credo that in order to be successful, they must treat existing clients with the same care and dedication as they do new prospects that has made R&R Insurance the grand prize winner of the Waukesha Area Chamber of Commerce's small business of the year award. The company also won the sub-category of insurance/health care.

Ken Riesch, owner, president and CEO of R&R Insurance Services in Waukesha, has guided his firm through continuous growth; targeting new business while maintaining a strong connection to existing clientele. His leadership has led the firm to be named the overall winner in the annual Waukesha Area Chamber of Commerce Top 10 Business of the Year awards program.

"We're being rewarded now for all of the investments that we've made over the last 25 years," Riesch commented when asked about how large R&R could become. "I think we're going to have tremendous growth."

He estimated that revenue for 2002 would be \$13-\$14 million. He plans for it to increase to \$20 million in three years. In order to do that, R&R has to follow one of Riesch's rules for success: Treat old customers the same as you do new.

"You've got to treat your first customers as good as the ones you're trying to [currently] get," Riesch says. "It's hard to balance. And that's why we have all of these managers."

All of those managers start with R&R's management team consisting of Riesch, Ken Kumrow, COO, and seven others. Kumrow has worked at R&R for 25 of the 26 years R&R has been in business. He says the secret to Riesch's success is really no secret at all: He invests a lot into the agency and the employees that staff it.

"He's the visionary and the leader of the agency," Kumrow said. "And he's surrounded himself with very good people. ... His asset is that he found these people and recruited them, but his agency's asset is those people."

Riesch is the first one to say that R&R's biggest asset is the people, and he has said it repeatedly. But



# R&R Insurance

## Insurance/Healthcare Category

he doesn't just talk-the-talk. Nineteen employees were willing to submit testimonials for the company, most of them mentioning how much they enjoy working there.

"Ken Riesch has given his employees a beautiful building to work in, state-of-the-art equipment and generous employee benefits," said personal lines agent Jeff Wolfram in his testimonial. "He keeps his employees happy. In return, he has a very loyal workforce with a very low rate of employee turnover."

"They provide you with the opportunity to be successful," human resources coordinator Brandy Pederson said in her testimonial. "Not simply by assigning a job title and salary to your position, but by providing you with meaningful work, a positive working environment, the opportunity to give the best of yourself, and a level of respect from management and co-workers that is unmatched by other companies."

Riesch said he is particularly proud of the fact that after 26 years the agency continues to write new business while still servicing existing accounts.

"When you grow the way we have, in the big picture, we must be doing some very, very good things for our customers," Riesch said.

And the community.

R&R, from Day 1, has always followed the philosophy of giving back to the community. That commitment comes not only in financial support but in supporting employees' volunteerism in their communities, as well.

"We get a commissioned income from this community," Riesch says. "I think it's only right, acting as a good steward, as a good leader that we give back to the community."

Besides treating his customers consistently and investing in employees, Riesch says he has planned for his success by thinking strategically and by not allowing complacency to creep into the business. R&R has also grown by acquiring established agencies, most recently adding West Bend-based B.C. Ziegler in July last year.

No matter what the challenge — whether it is the hard market conditions dominating all facets of the insurance industry or finding qualified employees — Riesch, and the employees of R&R, appear prepared.

R&R is experimenting with its Web presence, which Riesch views as a good marketing tool and an opportunity to service existing clients better and interact with insurance companies more efficiently, but he doesn't see sales generation in cyber space.

"People like to talk to people," he says. "People like having someone be a trusted advisor. When they have a claim, they want someone to be there and help support them."

The leprechaun suit notwithstanding, it's obvious that it didn't take the luck of the Irish to get Riesch and R&R where they are today.

**Company name:** R&R Insurance Services

**Location:** 1581 E. Racine Ave.

**Web site:** www.rrins.com

**Year founded:** 1976

**Product or service offered:** Commercial and personal insurance, estate planning and financial services

**Leadership team:** Ken Riesch, owner, CEO and president; Ken Kumrow, COO; Ken Kraft, CFO; Frank Maurer, VP-commercial sales; Pat Driscoll, VP-financial services; Nora Hauser, human resources director; Dan Wolfram, personal lines manager; Traci Catalano, marketing communications manager; Carl Rynders, IT manager

**Business organization memberships:** Waukesha Area Chamber of Commerce; West Bend Chamber of Commerce; Fort Atkinson Chamber of Commerce; Globex; WAHU – Wisconsin Association of Health Underwriters; International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans; PIA – Professional Insurance Agents of Wisconsin; IIA – Independent Insurance Agents; AGC – Associated General Contractors; ABC – Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc.; WUCA – Wisconsin Underground Contractors Association; APW – Aggregate Producers of Wisconsin; ASA; MBA – Metropolitan Builders Association; WBA – Wisconsin Builders Association; WLCA – Wisconsin Landscape Contractors Association

**Target clientele:** Commercial insurance/property and casualty,

very small businesses (1-5 employees) all the way through 1,000 employees; benefits insurance (health, life, disability, long-term care), small group, medium group, large group, self-funded groups; personal lines (home, auto, life).

**Biggest challenge your firm overcame in 2001:** The hard insurance market. Due to the events of 9/11, the down economy and companies not making money, it has really made it difficult to write and place coverage. It's become a supply-and-demand situation where fewer companies are covering certain lines while the number of customers looking for coverage remains the same, thus causing an increase in premiums. "The insurance plate is full and they can charge pretty much what they want," said CEO Ken Riesch.

**How your firm overcame that challenge:** Being honest with your customers and explain to them what's happening in the marketplace. We strive to create good relationships, offer very good services and let the customers know exactly what's going on in the marketplace.

**A business practice we're particularly proud of:** Writing new business as we continue to service our existing accounts.

You've got to plan on how you're going to be successful," Riesch said. "You can't allow complacency to come into your business. And then you've got to treat the customers that you've got, you've got to give them what you promised the ones you're trying to get."