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SprayFoamMagazine

Show Issue 2023

THE SECOND ACT

**Why helping an untapped resource may help a business
and provide a new life for ex-offenders**

Contractor's Corner





Tom Decker, owner and operator of Chicago Green Insulation has made it his personal mission to replace crime with employment. While this sounds like a daunting task, he has been deeply affected by crimes that could have been avoided, given the person who committed the crime had better access to employment and resources to better their life.

“I’m the survivor of someone who was murdered. I believe, had the guy who killed my godfather been home in bed feeling good about his life instead of drunk and in a bar, my godfather would be alive to this day. I think there are so many crimes that could be stopped with more employment.” – Tom Decker

The most important question the *Spray Foam Magazine* Team (SFMT) needed to ask was this, ‘Why do you think it’s important to give people a second chance?’ While this is a loaded question, the short answer is that Tom does not think that any of us are defined solely by our mistakes. He had the good fortune of growing up in a suburban area where the police gave him the benefit of the doubt when he was a rebellious teenager. They would bring him to the front door of his house, ring his doorbell and his parents would give him the appropriate consequences for his behavior. On the other hand, Tom has worked professionally with young and not so young returning citizens in previous positions and within his own business. They came from dysfunctional families with or without any parents to care for them, and few, if any, chances to make a mistake. “They just got consequences for their actions and that built a record, which means when they faced a judge, generally, they got the book thrown at them,” says Tom.

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PHOTOS PROVIDED BY TOM DECKER

The spray foam industry is a great environment for people to learn and grow. Tom mentions, “Foam installers generally do not have the stigma of ‘not in my backyard.’ NIMBY is a barrier that often pushes people away from

joining the industry because of phrases like 'we don't hire people like...' I can name dozens of top professionals in our industry who have shared with me that they were incarcerated as a young person and due to their credentials in the industry, they were not judged by their past, and many around them didn't even know about their past.

Darius Digby, an employee of Chicago Green Insulation says, "I feel good, because I'm getting a second chance," adding that he never imagined he would get a decent paycheck to be able to support his two school-age children. They live with their grandmother after their mother died while Digby was still in prison.

"Now that I got this job, I'm more stable and I could do more for my kids and my family," Digby said. "I never thought I'd be stable like I am now."

Decker is proud to install foam stating, "We are not competing with guys in the truck installing batts or cellulose... we are foam installers and we make super energy-efficient homes and businesses by stopping air leakage. Nowhere in that statement does anyone care about the person behind the spray gun and their background. Everyone involved in the project wants the space to be comfy... that's it." He makes a very good point asking these important questions:

- Are you using good chemicals?
- Are you using good equipment?
- Will the space be comfortable when all is done?

Tom wants his employees to be judged based on their skill and be paid accordingly. He wants them to be able to offer their kids a better life than the one they were offered. He wants them to buy homes, build wealth and do that from hard work and skill in their shop, their industry and through foam

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Giving an ex-offender a second chance can offer them a new life. This in turn can benefit their employer as these workers often want a chance to prove themselves, making them hungry to succeed and therefore more reliable and motivated. Getting ex-offenders back into the workplace can be a success for society too. Thanks to people like Tom, these men and women are getting back on their feet to make a good honest living, and learn an honorable trade like spray foam installation.