

Sure Signs communicating in style for 20 years

by Bonnie Stevenson



The Sure Signs staff came outside their new office for a photo op that includes, from left: Greg Drope (team leader); Sara Dunn (graphic design/sales); Jamie Janes (fabrication); Tom Schickler (president); Ben Ainsworth (production manager); Mark Tetrault (general manager); Josh Dutourgeerling (graphic design/sales); Kevin Moore (fabrication/installations manager).

When ideas and concepts have to be communicated in an instant, it takes an experienced, creative team of graphic designers and technicians to develop and execute effective signage.

After 20 years in business, Sure Signs has become the place to start when communication has to be precise, instantaneous, and most importantly, eye-catching.

The company began with a partnership of two: Tom Schickler and Kevin Moore. Tom brought with him 23 years of experience as a graphic designer at the Sarnia Observer. "When the Observer downsized, I decided I wanted to try a new business," he said.

Beginning simply, working at home with a digital operation, Tom says the business gradually expanded from large signs to storefront and other types of commercial signage and vehicle graphics. It progressed to awnings, banners, a wide range of industrial/commercial signage and printed materials.

Tom eventually became the sole owner of Sure Signs and Mark Tetrault joined the business, working for three years as a production manager before leaving to further develop his business and management acumen. Mark has returned now to take over the helm as the general manager at Sure Signs as Tom prepares for retirement.

One of the outstanding offerings available at Sure Signs is custom fabrication, which allows the production team to produce solid electrified signage when a customer wants his message to pop with visual fireworks. "By 2009, we were doing all kinds of signs and custom fabrication complete with welding," said Mark. "It has become a big part of the work we do at Sure Signs; we also do the installation and servicing of the signs."

He added the servicing of electrified signs is a good way to keep its message strong. "If your signs aren't as bright as they should be, we can come in and help you get a bit more mileage out of them," he said. "As people are coming back from the shutdown and budgets aren't so good, there's a lot we can do to service and maintain existing signs." Tom added, "Power-saving LEDs are really big now."

When the Sure Signs operation outgrew its former location, it was moved to a spacious 7,500 square-foot commercial space at 840 Confederation Street where there is ample space for the staff of eight and the production of its highly-diversified range of signage.

"We have a new sign shop, three in-house graphic designers, a production lead, a production manager, and three fabrication installers," said Mark. "We're one of the biggest sign shops in town and we're ready to serve many customers throughout Sarnia-Lambton and beyond."

Vinyl vehicle wraps, the newest offering in the every-widening range of Sure Signs products, have been growing in popularity. The durable vinyl signs make an attractive moving billboard out of vehicles ranging from small cars to buses to boats. They can be applied to cover a part of the vehicle or to fully cover it. "We're strict about the vinyl products we use and we have UV-rated laminates as well," said Mark. "If it's a business you want to represent, you want to protect your investment and you don't want it fading after a year or so. We take a lot of pride in using that product over the other competitors."

The wraps are not only impressive when they are new, they stand the test of time as well. Tom pointed out when a wrap is used according to the manufacturer's instructions, it can be removed without harming the surface to which it is applied. "It will last as long as you want it to, although it's harder to take off after three years because it tends to harden," he said. "It's pretty impressive. Some people can't tell it from paint when we're done."

Mark says the look on customers' faces clearly indicate how pleased they are when they see their newly-wrapped vehicle. "When the customers come to pick up their vehicles, we get to see their happy faces," he said. "We get a lot of compliments on the quality of our work."

The "office culture" at Sure Signs is one of camaraderie, a shared passion for the creative process and a desire to produce outstanding results. "It's a very tactile, creative business, so when someone comes in with an idea, we help them make that a reality," said Mark. "That's when we have a lot of fun, working with them and pulling all that together into the design phase."

And when production begins on a large project, the team works together. Mark explains, "The production phase is really enjoyable. We're back there cutting, trimming and preparing the graphics. The radio's on and there are a lot of laughs."

Warranties offered and honoured hold the key to Sure Signs' past and future success. "We're good with warranties. If there are any issues that shouldn't have happened, no matter how much time passes, we will make good on it," said Tom.

Every project is handled with the same exacting care, a quality Mark says has contributed well to the longevity of the business. "One of our core values here is that we don't cut corners," he said. "We stand by what we do."