Don Begneaud, Business Person of the Year

Don Begneaud is clear on one point: His wife of 15 years, Andi, is an equal partner in all he has accomplished.

And he’s accomplished a lot.

The company he and his wife co-own, BEGAID Manufacturing, has a reputation for quality work delivered on time, to spec and under budget whenever possible. The firm produces quality steel metal products with computer-aided systems that precisely punch and cut metal. Begneaud’s entry into the world of sheet metal precision came about 30 years ago, through an unlikely portal: sculpture.

Phil Stoves, president of Fagan Cloche Inc., describes Begneaud’s style of leadership as “blue.”

“He has the color blue,” Stoves says, chuckling, “and that means he’s also observed the substance of Begneaud’s leadership abilities not just the style.”

“He’s hands-on and pragmatic,” Stoves says. “He sees research and development, but it’s under a practitioner’s eye. He’s ambitious and pragmatic, and he’s transparent — what you see is what you get.”

Phil Sewell, who is president of BEGAID Manufacturing and works closely with Begneaud, agrees with Stoves’ take on the how leadership: he is inventive and innovative.

“Don’s leadership style can best be described as entrepreneurial,” Sewell says. “They just do it.”

Begneaud’s story is one of success and dedication to the business. He has a strong desire to achieve and is not afraid to take smart risks in the process. Don’s enthusiasm and creativity are hallmarks of who he is. He is so emotional attached to the business that some might consider him eccentric.

Begneaud then discovered the skill that lies at the heart of his Begneaud business: welding — and an equally important skill, business management — at age 18 when he worked as a welder and sculptor, earning his way through Lafayette and Lake Charles. Begneaud asked his parents to make him from a private school to a public school when he was a junior in high school, so he could develop his skills with welding further. After graduation, he majored in industrial technology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Between semesters, he worked part-time jobs welding out of the back of his truck.

The art developed into a business in 1978. As the Oil Boom swept through Lafayette, Begneaud opened his company. Still in school, he hired one employee to...
Now, in 2004, that one-man welding shop has grown into a precision sheet metal job and contract shop employing 54 people, housed in an 80,000-square-foot headquarters spread over four buildings.

"However, he is disciplined enough to work well with criminal minds, he can lead an army to the point of victory," says Swafford. And that is what the hard work, James and innovation for the business, the business that, over and, Tony Swafford continue tomorrow.