

# Winner INNOVATION

## Shining Bright

### Innovative products bring Christmas Light Co. very merry business

by JAN BUCCHOLZ

Contributing Writer

Santa Claus, as most believers know, runs the most productive organization on the planet. With his crew of elves and Mrs. Claus, of course, Santa produces zillions of gifts every year at his North Pole headquarters.

The official CEO of Christmas is an apt role model for Jamie Limber, chief executive of the Christmas Light Co. Last year, with a team of five, Limber's specialty lighting products company generated a very merry \$4 million in sales.

Projected sales this year: about \$6 million.

"We're such a unique business. We say our goal is to spread a little bit of light," says Limber, a 37-year-old maverick in an industry traditionally dominated by the jolly old boys' network.

"We are probably the youngest company in the Christmas products industry in terms of age. Most companies have been handed down through generations," says Limber, who readily confesses that generating such impressive revenues with such a lean staff looks a little like Christmas magic.

But it's really innovation. Not only is Santa impressed, but so is the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, which named the Christmas Light Co. the 2005 Most Innovative Small Business of the Year.

Creativity is priority No. 1 at the Christmas Light Co. Every product must be useful and inexpensive, designed for easy decorating and easy storing.

The four product categories are reels, poles, clips and storage bags, all manufactured in China and shipped either directly to retailers or to the company's warehouse in west Phoenix.

Retail prices range from \$1.99 to \$19.99.

Since its sensational debut in 1996 at the International Toy Fair in New York City, the Christmas Light Co. has developed about 50 new products.

"I've been their patent attorney for 10 years," says Kris Halvorson. "They are so full of ideas, they have kept me busy ever since."

It all started with Wrap-N-Roll, an easy-to-access reel storage system that keeps holiday lights tangle-free, especially those awkward icicle lights.

Limber knew first hand the value of efficient storage systems after he and a friend began decorating businesses in 1988.

"We started our freshman year at Arizona State because we needed money for school," he says.

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**Jamie Limber**  
Christmas Light Co.

Even with a degree in hand and a solid career in corporate America, Limber continued to take the month of December off, not for rest and relaxation, but to spread an ample helping of Christmas cheer.

After one too many "bah-humbugs" fumbling with icicle lights, Limber invented the Wrap-N-Roll prototype. Some 50,000 units sold at that first toy fair.

"The demand was much larger than we thought," says Limber. "I realized in the summer of 1997 that I had to resign from Philip Morris and go full time."

For the next several months, he researched overseas manufacturers and developed the company's infrastructure, hiring three elves, er, former colleagues.

The first year involved making a lot of lists and checking them twice. It would be almost 12 months before the company had a full inventory of products.

And it would take about one minute to sell several thousand of them, thanks to the QVC cable network's Christmas in July show. Limber was scheduled to do

a 10-minute segment, but after running a product review, all 4,500 available Wrap-N-Roll products sold out within one minute.

"We never even got on the air. It was a very good problem to have. That was one big momentum year," he recalls.

Every year since then has been a momentum year. Limber still hangs lights every Christmas and consults with his former college partner, who continues to decorate professionally.

"We analyze every step, because there's a product for every action," says Limber. "We sell solutions, not just products. We have a faster way to get lights up and a better way to store them."

The Christmas Light Co. products are available during the holidays at 45,000 retail locations such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Target, Kmart and Walgreen's. Although 99 percent of the business is wholesale, products still are featured on QVC, Home Shopping Network and on the company's Web site.

Limber's workshop already is in high gear for this Christmas season.

"We don't have recurring revenue," he says. "People keep their products year after year, so we have to come up with new solutions every year."

While some of the new products already are in production and will be available this fall, there's a top-secret innovation that might even surprise Santa. Says Limber: "It could completely change the industry, a complete paradigm change."

Ho Ho Ho.



Inventing the Wrap-N-Roll reel storage system helped turn Christmas into a year-round holiday for Jamie Limber, founder of the Christmas Light Company.

#### Christmas Light Co.

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**Employees:** 5

**Founded:** 1997

**Type of business:** Christmas light accessories