

TUUCI COMBINING MARINE PERFORMANCE WITH CUTTING EDGE DESIGN

The story of TUUCI reads like a classic tale of American entrepreneurship. A young man begins his work life rigging boats where he is exposed to both the practical and theoretical methods of how things are built to function simply and reliably. These early impressions later serve as inspiration.

"TUUCI was born from the marine industry," says Dougan Clarke, CEO of the Miami-based leader in innovative shade structures. "I rigged boats for nearly 10 years and gained valuable knowledge in the proper use of high-performance, marine-grade materials and the critical demands of marine construction. I also worked for an outdoor furniture retailer in Miami for many years. My goal was to apply this unique blend of professional experiences into an entrepreneurial venture."

Cashing in his 401K in 1998, Clarke began his new company in his hometown of Miami. The company's name - The Ultimate Umbrella Company (TUUCI) - encapsulates its mission. A passion for innovation and connection to the environment is evident in all of TUUCI's offerings. TUUCI's Manta™ parasol resembles a manta ray with its gentle sweeping line. The Razor™ parasol has the ability to "raise" its shade membrane along the mast's vertical axis and rotate 360 degrees to follow the sun. The Zero Horizon™ parasol minimizes its visual impact with a perfectly flat zero-pitch canopy that maximizes shade utility.

"We have proven that there is more to shade architecture than a traditional market umbrella," Clarke said. "Innovation propels us. It's our oxygen."

TUUCI's core markets include exclusive resorts that create unforgettable shade ambiance. The company also focuses on amusement parks, institutions and the marine and food service industries. A breakthrough came in 2001 when TUUCI created its initial signature shade platforms and patented operating system.

In addition to its primary 50,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Miami, the company boasts three distribution points around the world, the newest of which is a 20,000-square-foot facility in Europe. Growth in Europe has been strong, as well as in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. TUUCI has also partnered with an assembly plant in Salvador, Brazil for the South American market.

"There is no typical TUUCI customer," Clarke said. "It may be a boutique hotelier in the south of France, a massive entertainment complex in Dubai or a single residential client in Palm Beach. Some of our clients select products that complement 'old world' traditional settings while others stretch the boundaries of contemporary shade and lounging design."

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Dougan Clarke

All of TUUCI's products are designed and manufactured in the Miami facility, which employs more than 110 people. While component parts are made in Miami, the company recognizes the value of purchasing commodities, such as stainless steel and aluminum, on the open global market. Strategic supplier relationships, including one with Glen Raven, help TUUCI maintain high quality standards while pushing the innovation envelope.

"Our relationship began with Allan Swers (Glen Raven's market manager in Florida)," Clarke said. "Allan is a terrific guy who took us under his wing when we were just starting out. He gave us fabric samples and he helped us establish relationships with Sunbrella fabric distributors. We knew right off the bat that we wanted to feature Sunbrella fabrics because of its superior quality and broad brand-name recognition. Carrying the Sunbrella brand helped put us on the map."

Since Swers' retirement in 2003, TUUCI's relationship with Glen Raven has become more diverse with support from several members of the Glen Raven team. The two companies regularly collaborate on marketing, styling and product development.

"Glen Raven is very generous with its knowledge and resources and that is what we value most in the relationship," Clarke said.

After 10 years, Clarke's contagious enthusiasm continues to show no limits. Most recently, Clarke created a breakaway creative division aptly named "Shadow Works." Recent innovations from this group have included the Crescent Lounge™, which won a design award at the Chicago Casual Market, the Cabo™ parasol, a 100 percent composite shade structure, and a few other introductions slated for late 2009 / 2010 release.

"The horizon seems endless to me. I see opportunities for our entire industry, from material innovations to operating systems to harmonizing the lounging experience with creative use of shade elements," Clarke said. "During these uncertain economic times, there's no doubt that innovation will drive our success."

OPPOSITE PAGE Inspirations for TUUCI's products are closely tied to the marine environment and its emphasis on products built to function simply and reliably. Carrying this philosophy forward is the TUUCI management team, left to right, Ward Usmar, vice president of sales and marketing; Tom Parker, president; Charles Munroe, COO; and Dougan Clarke, CEO.

