

# Long Beach

## BUSINESS JOURNAL

February 15-28, 2011

## Sign Designer Fast-Moving In The Digital Age

Westside Long Beach Firm TDI Signs Lands Contract In New York's Times Square



Art Rivas, president and CEO of TDI Signs, and his son Andrew Rivas, work together as a father and son team, designing and fabricating signs for major corporations across the globe. The company's headquarters are located at 1415 Seabright Ave. in Long Beach. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

■ By **SEAN BELK**  
Staff Writer

**A**dvertising dollars may have shrunk during the recession, but Art Rivas, president and CEO of Long Beach-based TDI Signs, known as Tankard Design Imaging, says projects couldn't be moving fast enough.

Tucked away in a Westside industrial building, just west of the Long Beach Freeway, the firm and its 20 employees have been illuminating brands, channel letters, logos, monuments, pylons and custom projects for the past 12 years as sign designers and fabricators.

Rivas, who started as a freelance sign buyer for financial institutions, attributes much of his success to following through with deals and keeping a local presence, while at the same time aggressively "thinking out of the box" and staying plugged in to today's digital media. "It's all about being interactive and social media; and being three or four steps ahead of the average sign company," he said.

TDI's work adorns some of the more familiar eateries and

establishments that make up Long Beach dining and nightlife, such as King's Fish House, Lucille's Smokehouse Bar-B-Que, Mimi's Café, the Yard House and Metropolitan Living on Long Beach Boulevard. TDI's portfolio also includes major corporations such as Bank of America, Starbucks and Lexus, along with regional and national clients including developers, retailers, restaurants and the hospitality industry.

But, one contract is turning heads all the way on the East Coast. After completing signs for action sportswear retailer Quicksilver at around 40 store locations, mostly in countries in South America, the Huntington Beach-based company approached TDI to design its new display in front of its store at Times Square in New York City.

And despite inclement weather conditions, the three-dimensional display debuted on New Year's Eve to a crowd of onlookers. "It's gotten a lot of great feedback on how attractive the sign is," Rivas said. "It's kind of cool to see a surfer come from one side of the building when it's zero degrees in New York City and snow is falling."

TDI collaborated on the project with D3 LED, LLC, a leading



Quicksilver's 12-by-100-foot digital display spans across the retail store's facade at nighttime at the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street. Today's digital displays include cameras that support interactive functions for passersby. (TDI Signs photograph)

digital-display engineering contractor, which has primary operations in New York City and Rancho Cordova. Today, the 12-by-100-foot display of streaming surfers and bikini models spans across the retail store's facade at the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street. The 120 separate display surfaces can be seen from various viewpoints from left to right and underneath.

The \$2.5 million contract has now become one of TDI's most notable projects with new displays to soon go up at stores in Hawaii and Las Vegas as well. As most companies are now looking to stay fresh and hip, the latest trend in the sign industry Rivas said is that most digital displays now come with cameras that support interactive functions and social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, where passersby can actually interact with images and are offered special promotions to lure patrons inside.

While the recession affected many retailers and chains, including Quicksilver, which shuttered 25 stores in 2008 due to slow sales, Rivas said his company luckily wasn't affected until last year, but he expects sales to start picking up again.

Although he considers his business one of the more "up and coming" in the industry, Rivas still has his share of local competitors, such as nearby Superior Signs, which has been in business for more than 40 years in Long Beach, and Flynn Signs, which is located in the city's now newly designated Design District at the 1300 Block of Coronado Avenue.

Today, TDI works with a majority of big name corporations that has launched his sign design and manufacturing company worldwide, along with sales offices in Orange County, Los Angeles and

San Francisco, but that wasn't always the case. Rivas, co-owner of Platinum Limousine & Party Bus near the SeaPort Marina at 2nd Street and Pacific Coast Highway, decided to start his company more as a design firm after getting out of the freelance sign business all together.

"I never wanted to be a sign company," he said. "I thought I was more of a designer and a think tank . . . but always commit to what I agree to, whether it be a handshake or a contract, and we found ourselves becoming very successful very fast."

With his son Andrew Rivas, also a designer, the duo has since quickly gained notice in the industry, owning the latest sign-making equipment and buying the building that houses the design and manufacturing operation at 1419 Seabright Ave. Rivas added the name Tankard after his long-time mentor and father figure Don Tankard, who he said was an instrumental part of his life and "taught him the difference between right and wrong." Also, being a minority business enterprise is another aspect that Rivas holds dear, flying both a Mexican and American flag in his shop.

Born in Lakewood and raised in Long Beach, Rivas said staying local and keeping his employees in Long Beach is one of his main focuses. "What I really try to do is stay in Long Beach and keep my employees here," he said. "I got 20 employees here, I have about 50 drivers [at Platinum Limousine] so I have quite a bit of employees in Long Beach . . . I'd like to open a restaurant some time. My love is for the City of Long Beach and the community and we're going to try to grow this company the best that we can." ■