

# BUSINESS

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## Unbottled water

Company rents and services filtration system for \$50 to \$100 a month, depending on volume.

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Jeff Leeka looks for omens, tries to stay ahead of popular trends and maintains a profound respect for technology.

A former lobbyist and media relations man for SBC, now known as AT&T, Leeka quietly has declared war on plastic water bottles. Since 2004, Leeka's been the owner of Pure Water Technology, a dealership that installs and services filtered water systems at area businesses.

And if Leeka's ahead of the right trend, he believes the world will be a better place and Pure Water will pour money.

A transplant SBC brought to San Antonio from Missouri, Leeka arrived in 2000 with almost 25 years in the company. That same year, SBC offered early retirement to people who turned 45 by a certain day.

"I turned 45 on that day," Leeka said. "I thought the stars were lining up. The day they offered it was

the day I took it."

Leeka didn't know what he wanted to do next, but he had a few ideas. Ed Whitacre, his former boss, often told executives to think about staying ahead of the curve. That advice stuck.

Leeka wanted an 8 a.m.-to-5 p.m. operation that was business-to-business oriented, was environmentally friendly and utilized a technology that was ahead of the curve.

He found a photocopier servicing company that as a sideline rented and serviced a novel water fountain that was sold by a Sandpoint, Idaho-based company, Pure Health Solutions Inc. The copier company wanted to sell its San Antonio dealership in the water business so Leeka put together several hundred thousand dollars and took the dive into self-employment.

Starting with 100 corporate clients, Leeka's firm is up to 900 today, he said.

"Annual sales are \$1 million."

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The machines serve cold or hot water and can be connected directly to coffee and tea brewers.

# Water systems competing with big bottles

plus," he said. "Our sales are growing at 25 percent per year."

His competition is water fountains that just chill tap water and all those 5-gallon water bottle dispensers. He points to the cost and hassle of dealing with delivery, installation and storage of water bottles and what he hopes is a growing trend away from them.

San Antonio Credit Union replaced its water fountains and bottled water dispensers at its headquarters and all 17 branches with Leeka's machines, SACU property specialist Carmel Elizardo said.

"We've been getting positive feedback," Elizardo said. "It lowered our cost with the bottled water. All we pay is the maintenance."

"There's no waiting for delivery," Elizardo added. "Space was another issue. Wherever the bottled water was, we had several bottles piled up between deliveries."

The city of Los Angeles banned departments from buying bottled water in 2005. San Francisco's mayor followed suit last year, ending the city's \$500,000-a-year bottled water habit. This March, Seattle banned bottled water at city events to cut down on trash.

Rent on one of Leeka's systems ranges from \$50 to \$100 a month depending on volume, he said.

"I love technology," Leeka said. "And I love how it makes things easier."

If bottles create problems, Pure Water Technology is the solution, he insists. The touch sensor controls give users access to highly filtrated water that self-oxygenates every day to control bacteria. It serves cold or hot water and can be connected directly to coffee and tea brewers, an option that Leeka also provides.

SAS Shoemakers' facilities coordinator Billy Smith has experienced nearly three years of trouble-free use with Pure Water machines, he said. More than 25 were installed in the San Antonio and Del Rio plants. "You don't have to worry about cleaning up your machines," Smith said. "With bottled water, basically you pour it into an open container and it stays there for days on end."

"We don't really have to touch these," he said. "If they break, we pick up the phone and call Jeff."