

# Member Profile:

## Wichita Plater Rewarded for Hard Work

Bill Vann, owner of River City Plating and member of the Wichita Branch, learned the plating business the hard way. He checked out books from the local library and read all he could find on plating. He then started a small plating business at his home

in 1993, while holding down a full-time job, and learned the rest by trial and error.

Vann's process lines have grown from three 35-gallon tanks to a line of 750-gallon tanks that process nickel-, chromium- and copper-plated parts for aircraft companies, machine shops and individuals. Basically, he plates just about anything.

He also works with local transition houses and offers a mentoring program to help young adults overcome adversity and obtain the skills and attitude to succeed in life.

All of this earned Vann the 1999 Minority Small Business Person of the Year award for the Wichita district. Raytheon Aircraft Company, one of his customers, nominated him for the award.

Currently, about 60 percent of work at the jobshop is commercial, and the rest is for individuals who have special items for finishing. "I have one of the few places around where you can bring in a 1955 Chevy bumper and get it chrome-plated," Vann said.

By accepting jobs that other shops don't want, Vann has plated some very unusual items during his career. "You never know what's going to come through the door," Vann said. He once gold-plated a coiled, dead snake for a customer who wanted to preserve it. "I had to go to the library and check out a book about how to plate non-conducting objects," he said. "But, I got it done."

Vann studied religion in college, and he still works as a minister at a local church in Wichita. Before starting a plating shop, he worked as a technician for Xerox Corporation.

Knowing very little about the plating business made life difficult for Vann at the start. Besides reading everything he could find on the subject, he visited some local shops hoping to gain some knowledge, but found many shops were not eager to share it.



*Wichita Branch member Bill Vann was named 1999 Small Business Person of the Year.*

Jack Wilhite of Dawson Brothers Plating, president of the Wichita Branch, says Vann is a man of foresight and courage. "He got into a business where work comes and goes like a yo-yo, but he had guts enough to tough it out and survive," Wilhite said.

Drawing praise for his workplace mentoring program, Vann said he began the program out of necessity. "I couldn't find the employees that I needed anywhere else, so I took the roughest guys around. I found them at a transition house, gave them a job and a reason to keep trying," he said.

"I believe that every person has the potential to succeed," Vann continued. The program has been a bridge for many young men to get back in the mainstream of society. "I try to motivate them and cultivate their potential," he said.

Without a doubt, AESF member Bill Vann is showing a positive side to the plating and surface finishing business in the Wichita area. P&SF