



# Meet Jim Berardi

## Co-Owner DiVinci Painters



### What year did you open DiVinci Painters?

My business partner, Mike Foley, and I started DiVinci Painters in 1984 after college. During the summer, a neighbor asked for some help painting his house, so not knowing much, we said yes. We thought we needed a name for our company, so as a joke we said, let's call ourselves DiVinci. But, we spelled it wrong (so much for college!) Well, we kept getting referrals, and more and more jobs, so we decided to make a go of it.

### How did you and Mike meet?

Mike and I met when our mothers were both Brownie leaders for our older sisters. We were probably four or five years old at the time. We went to grade school and high school together, so we've known each other since we were kids.

### What are each of your roles?

Our roles in the business are both similar, as we have both developed long lasting client relationships that we continue to serve and we both take active roles in running, nurturing, and growing the company.

Why did you decide to start this type of business?

Mike and I are both very entrepreneurial and really loved the idea of working for ourselves, even though it was a tough long road to learn this business. To be honest, our parents weren't too happy the first couple of years.

### What did you do prior to this?

We were both college students before starting DiVinci. We both worked at the Glencoe Golf Course during the summers, which is where we learned the service part of the business by being around lots of North Shore homeowners.

### What services does DiVinci Painters offer?

We are a full-service painting, decorating, and remodeling company, doing most of our work on the North Shore of Chicago and throughout Northern Wisconsin. We do all aspects of painting, wallpaper, high end decorative faux finishes, fine paints of Europe high gloss applications, Italian lacquer painting for kitchens, drywall installation, and we also have a fully staffed remodeling division for kitchens,

bathrooms, and carpentry projects.

What excites you most about your industry?

What gets us excited every day is meeting new clients and continuing to grow the business. Also, being in a trade business like ours gives us the opportunity to not only mentor young people (which we

love), but also gives us an opportunity to help people keep their homes looking beautiful and maintained year after year.

### What do you love most about what you do?

What I love most about what I do is not only being a leader of a large organization (we had over 155 painters and 10 carpenters this past year, along with our staff of 27 people), but also being able to sell our brand every day and meet new people, while establishing long lasting relationships with them. I also love having family members join our team and helping them develop into leaders.

### Why did you choose Highland Park?

We chose Highland Park because we both grew up here and it's where we had the most connections. Plus, we believe that Highland Park is the epicenter of the North Shore!

### What sets DiVinci Painters apart from your competition?

What sets DiVinci Painters apart from our competition is the genuine family-type culture that comes through to customers – everyone from the guys in the field and the project managers to the salespeople and the office staff – we all stand behind everything that we do. Painting can be a complicated endeavor and there are always twist and turns on projects, but we stand behind what we promised and will do whatever it takes to satisfy our customers. Here's a quick story. We were doing a job, and the homeowner said there was a cat in the house and asked us to please be careful going in and out. Well, at the end of the day, the crew could not find the cat and we were panicked. The whole crew started searching the neighborhood. They found the cat and brought it back to the house. When the homeowner returned, she asked, "Whose cat is that?" Her cat was hiding under the bed, and we didn't know it! We found somebody else's cat!

### How has your business evolved from the early years until now?

Our company has evolved from just me and Mike painting on our own to having more than 45 crews and a remodel division.

When we first started, Mike and I were not the greatest painters, but we knew when we were in someone's house it was the most important place to them, so we made sure we cleaned it up and respected it as if it were our own. I'll never forget when we first started...we were vacuuming the carpet and wiping down everything when the homeowner came home and was so impressed; thankfully, she didn't look up at the cut lines!

### What are some of your most memorable (or most spectacular) projects?

Well, one of our most memorable projects certainly has to be doing work at Michael Jordan's house for an entire summer. I had his gate code which I have sworn to secrecy, and we were not allowed to talk about the house or to Michael who I was actually standing right next to at one point! We've done so many beautiful custom homes; gorgeous homes on the lake; magnificent penthouse jobs in the city. I can't divulge much, but I can tell you I have seen amazing things you can never imagine in some of these homes and on the properties we've worked on.

### How would you describe DiVinci Painters to someone who has never used your services?

I would describe DiVinci Painters as a full-service painting company that you can trust with your most valued possession. We are a business built on word-of-mouth references. We take a lot of time to try to get to know you and to understand what's most important to you on the job. No two jobs or people are the same and we really enjoy the diversity. We love to engage in someone's vision and make it happen.

### What else do you want people to know about you and/or your business?

Mike and I are proud of how much we (and DiVinci) are involved in charity and community work. I am a member and Past President of the HP/Highwood Rotary Club. Mike and I are both very involved with our churches, and we donate to a myriad of community organizations. And I know I'm going off script a little bit here, but owning my own business also has allowed me to coach football. I was the Highland Park heavyweight coach for 7th and 8th graders for eight years for the Little Giants, and then I was asked to coach at Highland Park High School and became the freshman head coach. I did that for eight years and then moved up to varsity for three years. I just retired last year. I felt that having a strong football program in Highland Park was very good for the community and for the kids to feel part of something that they could be proud of. The relationships I made over the years are priceless and I have been so grateful that I was able to do something that I truly loved with a passion.

### If you didn't have to sleep, what would you do with the extra time?

If I didn't have to sleep, I would continue coaching football and play more golf with my four daughters, all of whom played or are playing in college.

### If you could have dinner with anyone (living or deceased), who would it be?

I'd love to have dinner with JFK.

### What three words best describe you?

Passionate, caring, and competitive.

### What's your favorite all-time movie?

It would be a tie between Godfather II and Sink the Bismarck!

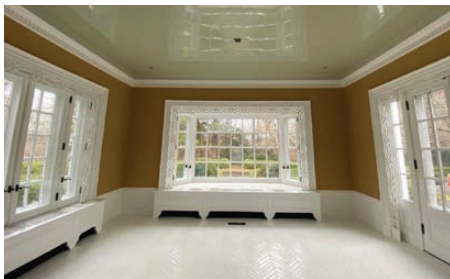
### What's your favorite TV show?

It was Friday Night Lights.

### What's your favorite holiday?

My favorite holiday is Christmas. I love celebrating with my entire family at Immaculate Conception.

### If you could travel anywhere in the world,



Park but didn't know each other and we ended up meeting at a party at Lake Point Tower. There was a girl who sat down on my lap and my wife saw how uncomfortable I was. So, she came over and pretended to know me and the other girl got up and left. My wife saved me! I got her phone number, but I didn't call right away. She ended up calling me, thankfully, and the rest is history!

I also want to mention how truly blessed we are to have four beautiful daughters who are smart, intelligent and all great athletes (they didn't have a choice!) Instead of timeouts, I made them get up and run laps around the house until they were tired. My youngest daughter used to scream hoping the neighbors would call the police – it didn't work!

### What's the best advice you've been given?

Take a deep breath.

### What's the worst advice?

Authority is always right.

### What is your favorite quote?

Do today what others won't, so tomorrow you can do what others can't.



that week in practice that said, "Win #2." There were a lot of people at the game, and it was being filmed for a local TV station. We were playing Pillsbury College from Minnesota. It was the 4th quarter and they just scored to take the lead with about three minutes left to go. They kick off and our guy fumbles the ball, and they recover at our 12-yard line. I was captain of the defense and played strong safety. As we were coming onto the field to play defense all I can think of is there's no way we're losing this game. We knew that they had a play called "Alley Screen, but they had not run it all game. It's a play where the quarterback throws laterally out to the receiver with two blockers in front of him. As the quarterback came to the line of scrimmage, I saw him look over quickly to my side and I knew he was going to throw that play. As soon as the ball was snapped, I ran across the line, and he threw it right to me and I was off running



### where would you go?

I would love to go to Antarctica.

### Who is your mentor, and why?

I don't really have a mentor, but there are two books that have influenced me. One is called The Wisest Man Who Ever Lived about King Solomon, and the other is Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking. I picked up the book when I got out of college and read it cover to cover in one day. I refer back to it all the time.

### What are some small things that make your day better?

When I meditate in prayer...

### How do you relax after a hard day of work?

After a hard day of work, I love coming home to my wife and having dinner together. We still have two children at home from college (on and off), so I love the family time. My wife is an awesome cook, so I can't wait to get home!

### What's the luckiest thing that happened to you?

The luckiest thing that ever happened to me is meeting my wife. We are both from Highland

### What would you do with \$1 million to impact the most people?

I would help establish a clean water supply in communities where there is none, especially in Africa.

### What's the hardest lesson you've learned?

One of the hardest lessons I've had to learn is to stay in the present.

### What do you wish you told yourself 10 years ago?

I wish I told myself not to invest in oil wells!

### If you could have a video of any one event in your life, what event would you choose?

If I could have a video of any event in my life, it would be one that really helped me establish confidence in myself. I played football at Marquette. They had a Division III club team and we played Division III NCAA programs. The team had not won a game in eight years, but had a legitimate coach and staff. It was our last game of the season and we had just won our first game the week before against Beloit College and there was a lot of buzz on campus about the football program. The editor of the school paper wrote a derogatory article about football and the program. I put a piece of tape on my helmet for

90 yards. However, I was caught at the 10-yard line. My dad was there and was kind of upset with me for not scoring. I found out later that the guy who caught me was a sprint champion from Minnesota! We scored two plays later to win the game. The place went crazy, and it was a defining moment for me. From that point on I knew I could create my reality and not be fearful of anything that challenged me. I believe that that play set me up for success of being a good business leader, a respected football coach and a great husband and father. What are you most looking forward to in the next 10 years?

In the next 10 years, I'm looking forward to continued growth of the company, giving back to the community and engaging and mentoring young people, including Mike's daughter and my daughter who work with us. And, of course, I'm looking forward to grandchildren - maybe a quarterback or two? Come on girls let's go!

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