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Beat goes on at medical equipment installer, transporter

BYLINE: **Bill Church** correspondent

When the Belfor USA subsidiary he managed was about to be sold in 2000, Russell J. Knowles faced a decision. He could allow St. Lucie West-based Remetronix to possibly disband, throwing its 20 employees out of work, or he could continue to lead his team as the company's new owner.

"On behalf of the employees, I felt an obligation to continue to lead," Knowles said.

Joining with veteran installer and information specialist Nick Giallanzo as partner, Knowles bought the company, a specialized medical imaging equipment transportation and installation organization. Six years later, the privately held firm now employs 125 professionals stationed around the country in three different companies and has racked up year-over-year growth of 10 percent.

This year has been outstanding thus far, according to Knowles, with close to 3,000 assignments compared to 2,500 last year.

Remetronix is the largest company in a niche, but very important, business. The firm serves nine of the top 10 original imaging equipment manufacturers by transporting large medical imaging and nuclear medicine equipment to customer sites, like hospitals and other medical facilities. The company puts into operation magnetic resonance imaging machines, computed tomography equipment, positron emission tomography nuclear medicine equipment and machines for cardiovascular labs.

Remetronix employees use a forklift or crane to lift the equipment into the building, assemble it, hook up all the cable, connections and computers, and then normally turn it over to the manufacturer's techs for calibration. Remetronix employees are now being trained in calibration so that the company can provide turnkey service.

This medical equipment logistics business was born in the early 1990s when manufacturers decided it would be more cost-effective to outsource the work than to use their engineers to pull cables and install equipment.

Knowles worked for Siemens Medical Solutions USA, a major medical equipment manufacturer, for 16 years. In 1993, he requested a transfer to the Treasure Coast for family reasons. He stayed with the Remetronix subsidiary when it was sold to Belfor USA, then bought it in 2000.

Today, Remetronix operates from an 8,000-square-foot building in St. Lucie West, built two years ago to the company's specifications. More than 25 professionals coordinate, schedule and dispatch technicians from that location, and the facility houses such back-office functions as accounting and human resources.

Remetronix works closely with Indian River Community College, using state grants to provide training for employees. IRCC even helps out by sending instructors to the company facility.

"We've been fortunate in recruiting professional people," Knowles said. "If they lack some skills, IRCC trains them."

In addition to Remetronix, Knowles created two sister companies. He founded Techmed Solutions in 2002 in response to requests from customers in the highly competitive original imaging equipment manufacturing industry. They wanted a different company than the one serving their competitors.

"It seemed important to them then, but now they could care less," Knowles laughs. "Ironically, Techmed has now become an important, well-branded company in its own right."

In 2003, Knowles started a trucking subsidiary, Med-Trans Logistics. For all three companies, Knowles is president and chief executive and handles business development while Giallanzo is vice president and chief operating officer, managing field and day-to-day operations.

The three companies operate in the United States and Canada, Ireland and Indonesia. Customers include industry giants Siemens Medical Solutions USA, General Electric Health Care, Fuji Film Medical Systems and Hologic.

"We use Remetronix personnel because they are expert assemblers and riggers of large and difficult-to-install image equipment," said Gonzalo Diaz, vice president of operations for Miami-based Med-Lab Supply Company, the agent for Siemens in the 10 counties of South Florida. "They do more of that specialized work around the country than anyone else."

Working mainly for insurance companies, Remetronix also provides disaster recovery services. With its specialized skill, the company can decontaminate, repair and clean this very expensive imaging equipment in a matter of days following a fire, flood or some other catastrophe in a hospital. The company's specialists continue to consult for several New Orleans medical facilities which suffered severe water damage during Katrina last year.

Not only does this service generally cost just 10 percent of the replacement expense, it gets the revenue-producing imaging equipment back in service in a matter of days.

Remetronix is branching out, having just inked a deal with Vero Beach-based XStream Systems to distribute that company's new patented X-ray system for materials identification. The device allows law enforcement organizations to identify drugs and pharmaceutical manufacturers to confirm the materials in their

products. The equipment is being considered for possible use in homeland security.

According to Knowles, XStream's product is more compact, fast and affordable than other equipment currently on the market.

"Based on the evolution of our company we continue to expand upon our service offerings in other areas," Knowles said. "Within the past year, we have begun doing more trouble shooting and on site support for customers, and I envision we will be offering more project management services in the near future."

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