

## ComDoc Creates a Company Worth Keeping

ComDoc employee-owners presented their vision, "A Great Place to Work and a Great Place to be a Customer," during a panel discussion at the April 21st conference. Incorporated in 1955, ComDoc provides copier, fax and printer solutions and employs 540 partners in 5 states. The firm is 42% employee-owned, and recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of their ESOP. They believe that their culture of ownership, core values and beliefs drive their ongoing success and the results are clear—revenues have increased from \$18 million in 1984 to \$101.5 million in 2005; and company stock value has grown from \$8 per share in 1985 to \$262 per share in 2005.

### A Passionate Commitment to Customers, Partners and Communities

ComDoc asks each partner to be AD-EPT—Accountable, Decisive, Ethical, Passionate, and Trustworthy—and these core values inspire them to focus outwardly. As Andrea Capuano, ComDoc's Director of Human Resources, explained, "We have a culture of community service here at ComDoc, and it benefits us in many ways. Our partners feel good about giving back to our communities and our customers see us as an organization that invests in our communities." In 2005, ComDoc celebrated their 50th anniversary in business with the "50 Ways ComDoc Cares" program. ComDoc partners at all 10 of their locations were encouraged to organize community projects throughout the year to meet that goal. "We definitely surpassed that goal," states Capuano. "I think we ended the year with over 60 projects—I'm still hearing about ones that didn't make our list!" The programs included efforts such as fundraisers, regular volunteer days at a homeless shelter and appreciation parties for their customers.

### A Commitment to Personal Growth

ComDoc's partnership with Akron Children's Hospital grew from the vision of Executive Administrator, Joyce Swords. Following the death of her daughter, Swords felt the hospital needed a stronger parental support program. She approached CEO Riley Lochridge with her idea, which Lochridge

promptly endorsed. His only request was that Swords herself be involved, and he designated 50% of her ComDoc work hours for two years to be directed to creating and implementing the program. She has continued working with children through a ComDoc-sponsored leadership development program for high school seniors. "I've had the opportunity to spread my wings and make a difference in the lives of others and to become someone I wasn't yet through the support and encouragement of my ComDoc family," says Swords.

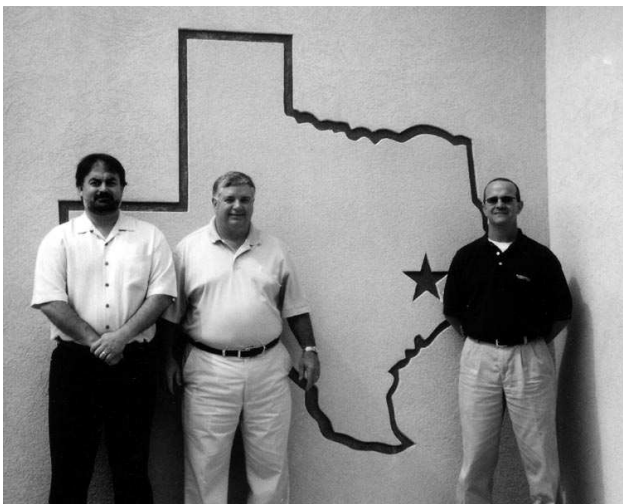
Eileen Cowgar, Customer Service Manager, started with ComDoc 28 years ago as a switchboard operator. During the panel discussion, she explained the value of employee development in building an ownership culture and a successful business. "Riley Lochridge, our CEO, tells us everyone can be a leader. He has faith in us. I was the switchboard operator and was eventually asked to step into a management role. That's not very common." Since then she has facilitated many initiatives, including the recent implementa-

tion of a supply department.

### Entrepreneurial Spirit

Syl Frazzini, General Manager of Youngstown operations, appreciates the ownership culture at ComDoc. "Our culture provides me with the opportunity to work with people who manage themselves," says Frazzini. ComDoc's environment encourages autonomy and supports the belief that responsible thinking, planning, execution, and challenging review are the basis for any meaningful result.

As ComDoc Help Desk Specialist Mike Boydston explained, "Our mission is to be the #1 choice of our customers, and as employee-owners we have the right to make commitments to our customers and to make sure these commitments are met." A 43-year veteran of ComDoc, Boydston helped launch the company's help desk ten years ago. He and his help desk partner, Mike Lorbach, are affectionately known at ComDoc as "the Mikes" and now handle 17,000 calls per year. He urges employee owners to make deci-



Newest Network Member South Texas Drywall's ESOP trustees, Brent Allen, Jack Gordon, and Kirk Iller (left to right), show Texas-style pride in their 100% ESOP-owned business. Located in Columbus, the firm works with 60-200 union-affiliated employees in Central Ohio's construction market.

sions, look for ways to save money, and always err on the side of the customer.

Ohio's Employee-Owned Network is sponsoring a special series during 2005 on Great Places to Work: Sharing Our Successes. These sessions will look at how real companies have built a sustainable business. Join the inter-company dialogue on ways to develop people and workplace culture, help the environment, and improve the community. The series started on June 22 in Dayton, and will continue October 19 in Columbus, and November dates TBA in northeast Ohio and Cincinnati. [oww](#)

## Governance in ESOPs

What's different about governance in an employee-owned company? What are effective structures and processes for the board of directors in an employee-owned firm? In what ways are Directors accountable to ESOP participants? These questions and more prompt intense discussion among Network members because many ESOP firms' boards operate quite differently from boards in conventional companies.

One example is the selection process for directors of The Ruhlin Company, an 82% ESOP-owned construction and construction management firm headquartered in Sharon Center. Ruhlin's 5-member Employee Advisory Team members recruit, interview and recommend the candidates for the four outside director positions and two inside director positions. Ruhlin's 90 ESOP participants then vote on the slate of candidates on a one-share one-vote basis. The two inside employee directors serve as liaisons between the Employee Advisory Team and the board. This process provides ESOP participants with a voice in governance. Currently chaired by the company's IT Manager, Fred Beaver, the overall mission of Ruhlin's EAT is to foster input and ESOP employee participation in the company's financial well-being through employee training, education, and recommendations pertaining to corporate governance.

The first Network-sponsored forum on Governance in ESOPs will be held on Wednesday, September 20 in the Akron area. Topics will include:

- What's different about governance in

an ESOP company?

- Legal responsibilities of Directors in an ESOP
- Relationship of the Board with the ESOP Administration Committee and ESOP Trustees
- Breakout sessions on Basics of ESOPs for Directors; Strategic Planning in an ESOP; and A Closer Look at Board Committees

This event will be held the day after the CEO/CFO Networking Dinner on Tuesday, September 19 at Firestone Country Club, hosted by ComDoc, Inc. Watch for details. [oww](#)

## Telling Your ESOP Story

Marland Mold Company, a 100% employee-owned firm in Pittsfield, Massachusetts has a DVD which tells the story of their successful employee buy-out effort. Filmmaker Paula Consolini of Williams College encouraged employee-owners at the Network's Communications Roundtable in April to use digital story-telling to tell their employee ownership history and culture through sharing the experiences and impressions of those involved. Marland's story provides a powerful orientation for new employees and the broader community. Two Ohio ESOPs, Prentke Romich Company and ACRT, have created videos of company gatherings to share with employees who live and work far from the Ohio headquarters.

Do you want to tell your story? Consolini suggests you try to borrow digital equipment through your public access TV station and use inexpensive editing software. Kent State's mass communication faculty and students can help you plan and execute a video that tells your employee ownership story. Call the OEOP at 330-672-3028 for details. [oww](#)

## Will-Burt and Baer Family Celebrate Orrville's History

The Will-Burt Company, a 100% ESOP-owned firm in Orrville, was selected as a feature exhibit of the Orrville Historical Society's community celebration in May. W-B employees Andrea

Russell and Deborah Douglas organized the effort. The firm's 270 employees specialize in precision machining, welding, sheet metal fabrication, and the complete assembly of complex products including telescoping masts for cellular, lighting, military and commercial broadcasting. Will-Burt's ESOP was established in 1985 to purchase shares sold by Martha Baer, (pictured at the celebration with Jeff Ev-



Martha Baer, seen here with Will-Burt CEO Jeff Evans, sold shares of stock to the ESOP established by The Will-Burt Company in 1985, following the death of her husband.

ans, Will-Burt's CEO) following the death of her husband, Bill Baer, whose great-uncle was a founder.

Today the firm, which has well established roots in Orrville since 1918, has achieved growing sales worldwide.

For more information on Network events and membership, contact Karen Thomas at the OEOP, 330-672-3028. [oww](#)

## Select Machine Featured in Business Week's BW Smallbiz Magazine

Ohio's Select Machine, the first co-op created by a 1042 rollover, was the feature story in the Spring 2006 issue of BW Smallbiz, Business Week's magazine for small business. For more information on Select Machine, see the previous issue of *Owners At Work*. [oww](#)