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Other World Computing built an on-site wind turbine that was installed in 2009 at their corporate headquarters in Woodstock. OWC became the first technology manufacturer/distributor in the U.S. to become 100 percent on-site wind powered.

OWC is The Green Team

Woodstock company among 2011 Business Champions

By KURT BEGALKA

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WOODSTOCK – Other World Computing not only operates green, it continues to earn a fair amount of “green” because of its trailblazing business practices – including attention to details, attention to each and every customer and attention to its dedicated work force.

“You treat people the way you want to be treated,” said Larry O’Connor Sr. director of technical solutions for OWC. “Here everyone is treated with respect. Every part and product is important.”

It is an approach that earned the Woodstock technology company – whose bread and butter is upgrading computers, internally and externally – the 2011 Business Champion Award for companies with more than 100 employees.

OWC Chief Executive Officer Larry R. O’Connor expects revenues this year to climb 20 percent from a year ago – between \$83 million and \$88 million. And it is hard to find a company more environmentally aware than OWC. Last year it received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design platinum certification – the highest level awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, D.C. OWC’s headquarters also earned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Energy Star rating for building operations in September 2010, performing in the top 25 percent of similar facilities nationwide for energy efficiency.

Improvements to the 40-acre OWC campus in Woodstock include: A geothermal heating/cooling system, fiber optic rooftop light-harvesting technology, high insulation value glass windows and exterior sunshade technology for reduced cooling costs, smart sensors to detect and adjust energy in unused rooms, a permeable brick parking surface that improves drainage and avoids contamination, the use of bio-swales in landscaping to improve water conservation, a reverse-osmosis water purification system, high-efficiency hand dryers in washrooms, and use of native plants, prairie grasses, waterless urinals and dual-mode toilets for water conserva-

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Business Journal special

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tion. Add to that a 194-foot-tall wind turbine, which provides more than double the current energy requirements of the 30,000-square-foot facility and near 100 percent waste recycling. Everything from office paper to cardboard is bailed and sold.

O’Connor said it represented more than a \$7 million investment back into the business.

“OWC was founded with a core mission of providing customers the resources needed to maximize their technology investment. Similarly, our new headquarters utilizes leading edge technologies to maximize our own use of natural resources and provide the highest level of operational efficiency,” O’Connor said. “We cut our power use by 70 percent.”

O’Connor, 37, a father of four from Prairie Grove, backed into the computer hardware business – starting a re-inking business for old printer ribbons in high school at the age of 14 from the garage of his family’s home, and eventually transitioning to a full-time computer business after returning home to Woodstock after two years at Marquette University.

His dad, called “Senior” around OWC, forever was clearing out space in various buildings around town for his son’s growing high-school side business: Helping people make their computers work better at a reasonable price. O’Connor was forever buying crates of discounted hard drives and re-selling them.

“There is added capacity you can unleash, tap the capacity that has always

been there,” he said.

O’Connor said he was “appalled” by the prices charged for things such as installing additional computer memory or installing new processors – a rather simple process he insists can be done by the average Joe with a few simple precautions. And the result? He likened it to going from dial-up to broadband. “Once you experience the speed there is no going back, to say the least,” he said with a grin.

O’Connor launched Other World Computing in 1988, which he later supplemented with several other peripheral businesses. All have continued to blossom. OWC in September was named to the Inc. 5000 list of “Fastest Growing Privately Owned Companies in America” for the fifth consecutive year. It also ranked 33rd on the Inc. 5000 “Top Computer Hardware Companies” list.

The father-son duo are quick to credit their employees for the company’s success. A business which began with 60 employees has since grown to 130, many of those long-term. If the O’Connors had their way, these valued team members would work at OWC until they retire – whether they are designing new products, installing additional storage capacity or boxing up some of the hundreds of products OWC sells.

“We had to have people, very dependable people,” O’Connor said of his decision to keep his business in McHenry County. “The company has always been very people-centric. ... OWC would be nothing without the people who work behind the scenes.”

It is because they have bought into the philosophy, the O’Connors said, that OWC has between 40,000 and 50,000 hits a day on its website. It is the reason that exports now account for 20 percent of its business; 180 countries worldwide including Europe, South America, Australia and Hong Kong.

“Our inventory turns over 10 to 12 times a year,” O’Connor said. “During a three to four-day span, during Black Friday and Cyber Monday, it is absolutely insane. This is the busiest time of the year.”