



VanAire Inc.

VanAire Inc. is a classic entrepreneurial tale that was founded in a garage by Richard Vandevusse in 1993. Richard grew the company to the point of being recognized as one of the Michigan 50 Companies to Watch in 2006. VanAire, Inc. is embraced by the small Upper Peninsula community of Gladstone where it employs 73 people and generates over \$10 million in annual sales.



VanAire Inc. is a designer of automation software, provider of technical solutions to wastewater pre-treatment and by-product recovery, and contractor for machining and manufacturing services. VanAire Inc.'s main objective is to provide customers with quality, design, and deployment. Their top goals are problem solving and 100% customer satisfaction by maintaining personal relationships with their customer base. Being ISO 9001 Certified, VanAire Inc. has instituted policies and procedures to ensure products meet company standards as well as customer expectations.

The future is bright for VanAire Inc., with a strong management team in place, a solid business plan and a culture to continue growth in these tough economic times. That is true, at least partially, due to the Michigan Small Business Technology and Development Center (MI-SBTDC) team.

Tragedy struck VanAire Inc., in May of 2008, with the unexpected death of company founder and former President and CEO, Richard "Dick" Vandevusse. A succession plan was not in place prior to Richard's death. Just as an insurance policy is essential in a business, succession planning is also vital for any unexpected transition in leadership.

In VanAire Inc's situation, a very capable and intelligent young management team was in place; however, definition of responsibilities and accountability was not. The President and CEO who could get funding with a phone call was gone, and the debt structure for the company was in need of overhaul.

At the time of Richard's death, MichiganWorks! Human Resource Specialist, Laurie Sovey, had been working closely with the VanAire Inc. management team, providing business services, and recognized a need for help in their transition.

"The key to success is understanding what the business needs and when to bring in economic partners. I believe the strong business relationship, and the ability to be empowered to make referrals to our economic stakeholders was instrumental in assisting VanAire Inc. in moving forward during this time of transition, says Laurie." Sovey coordinated a meeting to connect MI-SBTDC Business Consultants to VanAire Inc.'s management team.



Through its partnership as host to MI-SBTDC Region 1, MichiganWorks! knew the business consulting services provided through MI-SBTDC would greatly benefit VanAire Inc. Joel Schultz, Regional Director of Region 1 states, "Our contact with VanAire Inc. has been very enjoyable and rewarding. To see a hard-working group of young leaders pull together to overcome tragedy, work in conjunction with area agencies to quickly recover, and position themselves for growth is very encouraging given our current economic times. Our relationship with VanAire Inc. is mutually beneficial, as it should be, and we hope to work together to improve our local economy for years to come."

Support from the MI-SBTDC Headquarters brought in expertise from across the state, under the guidance of lead consultant Jim Beauchamp, to facilitate a strategic planning session, assist in process development, and connect the young management team with industry knowledge. "We have enjoyed working with the VanAire Inc. staff and confident their continued efforts will guarantee continued success and growth in the future."

The team effort was a "test run" for what is now the Growth Group (G2) Consulting Team offered across the state by the SBTDC. The head of the G2 effort is Nancy Boese, a MI-SBTDC veteran. Nancy was a vital player on the team for VanAire Inc., and is affectionately known as the "Tool Lady" within the MI-SBTDC network. VanAire Inc. took advantage of several MI-SBTDC tools, including the Strategic Needs Assessment, Strategic Actioning, Fiscal Fitness, and specifically benefiting from the Optimist software offered by the Network.

Mike Sanville was named Chief Executive Officer of VanAire Inc. four months after the death of Mr. Vandevusse. Sanville joined VanAire Inc. in 2000 as a chemist and has been an integral part of the environmental systems group since that time. "Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center representatives have provided services that have been beneficial to our company and our employees. We have enjoyed working with Jim and Joel and look forward to an ongoing partnership with the G2 initiative," stated Mike. In addition, Mike has played a key role in development of Ag Solutions, a subsidiary of VanAire Inc. that is the first operational bio-diesel production facility in the state.

MI-SBTDC continues to work with VanAire Inc. on a weekly basis, participating on several committees and facilitating action items from the Strategic Planning process. VanAire Inc. has been able to restructure their debt and is back in a position to be the innovative company they have always been known as, engaging in several new projects and technologies.

VanAire Inc. has become a textbook example of how an entrepreneurial company by collaborating with area partners and specific assistance from the MI-SBTDC can grow a company during a crises or not benefiting not only the company, but for the entire community around them.



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