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Local computer business keeps up with the times

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With technology advancing the way of the world and dictating the future, the owners of Ward Computer Services classify this decade as a "technology revolution."

"The industry is growing and developing so rapidly that most people and businesses are going to need experts to keep their services in line with the times," says Jasmine Ward, CEO of Ward Computer Services.

That's where she and her husband Samuel come in. For the past 22 months the couple has been utilizing their knowledge and expertise providing their clients with quality cutting edge technical support services and educating them on technological opportunities available. Services they provide consist of computer repair for residential customers, IT support and maintenance for businesses and organizations and Geographic Information Systems support for industries.

"Computer troubleshooting and repair, software installation, software migration, network maintenance, network installation and computer training is a vital component of our business," points out Samuel, WCS technical director and pc consultant.

"We find that businesses have invested quite a bit into their computer systems but are not getting a maximum return on their dollar or don't know the capabilities of what they have," says Samuel. "Our goal is to educate them on what they have, to make sure their equipment continuously works properly and to save them money in the long run by protecting and maintaining the system."

Involved in a changing diverse and crowded field, Samuel says they continuously study and attend workshops, seminars and classes to keep current on their skill level. "We are dedicated to our clients and strive to provide them the most up to date and professional services possible."

Confirming WCS's strategy and emphasizing their honesty, Melissa Wharton, owner of Desine Concepts says as a result of utilizing WCS services that she feels comfortable and confident that her computer system is up to date and working at its full capacity.

Indulging in Geographic Information Systems, a relatively new technology Jasmine, WCS webmaster and GIS specialist, says they offer their customers GIS feasibility studies to assist them in implementing specialized needs. She defines GIS as a computer-based, analytical tool that assembles, stores, manipulates, and displays geographically referenced information; this system is composed of hardware, software and data.

The GIS services WCS offer include needs assessment and planning, ground-up GIS implementation, GEO-spatial analysis, custom map creation and generation, census data mapping, map printing, layer collection and editing, data migration, geo-database creation and management and GIS training.

Married for two years last Christmas, the Wards say WCS Services evolved from a discussion concerning their dreams and goals in life.

"He wanted an IT business and I was interested in a consulting business focusing on GIS," says Jasmine. "After attending a business development workshop at the Duquesne University Chrysler Corporation Small Business Development Center and following the directions they provided we started the business doing residential computer work. Since then the business has expanded to working with small and medium size businesses with the goal to expand into managing large business networks," she calculates.

Another goal for WCS within the next five years is to become one of the top IT firms in the region. "We'd like for our name to roll off of people's lips," declares Samuel.

Jasmine's desire is to operate the GIS segment of the business on an international level. Currently WCS functions throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Washington, B.C. and New York.

Strong believers in education and training, Jasmine and Samuel both have connections to the University of Pittsburgh. Jasmine, a native of Hampton, Va. came to Pittsburgh to participate in the Engineering program and currently is an economics major. Samuel relocated from E. St. Louis, Ill. to Pittsburgh in 1993 as a participant in the Quest Program, which was designed for minority students with an interest in research. Because

of financial reasons his plans were switched and as a result he had the opportunity to meet people in the IT arena. Utilizing the invaluable knowledge gained from people like Alexander Nichols, who owned Computer Friends Computer Service, and combining it with the 11 years of experience from working at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing has prepared Samuel for the challenges of running his own business.

Reflecting over the period of time of operating their business, the couple pinpoints the best part of entrepreneurship as seeing a satisfied customer. "Helping people fulfill their dreams and understand that they don't have to be afraid of technology means mission accomplished," says Samuel. Laughing, and turning the coin, the Wards describe the worst part of the business as working with clients who have little computer savvy, who have you return repeatedly to fix the same problem. Also, they consider the cutthroat business that messes up and does not take credit for what they do as an irritant.

Operating as a husband/wife team also has its positive and negative points. "The positive is that we know one another's strengths and weaknesses, says Jasmine. "We have each other for support, a shoulder to cry on." The challenges are separating their personal life from the business. "It's hard to focus on our relationship if we don't make a cautious effort not to work all the time," explains Jasmine. "As a diversion we treat ourselves to special dinners, have a weekly date night and do fun things with the baby (three-month old Samson Elliot)."

She recommends that couples considering starting a family business to always find time for themselves.

Other than advising potential entrepreneurs to invest in a computer system that will handle their needs, the Wards' suggest seeking help and advice, to use the resources that are available.

"We used the Duquesne University SBDC, but there are a lot of groups out there offering help at every level," reveals Jasmine. They also suggest connecting with people sharing a business mind set who can keep one on the right track with the focus of taking you to the next level.

[Sidebar]

FAMILY BUSINESS-Samuel and Jasmine Ward discuss computer strategy for a client as three-month old Samson looks on.

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by Diane I. Daniels

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