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A/V Ranch

Extron Founder Blends Country, Technology in Anaheim

By **Sarah Tolkoff**

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Meet the man behind Extron Electronics Inc., an Anaheim-based maker of electronics for projector systems used in classrooms, boardrooms and auditoriums.

Andrew Edwards, 66, is a North Carolina native with a Southern drawl, a big laugh and a passion for two-stepping and classic country music.

He's also spent more than three decades making Extron a big player in audio/visual electronics.

Edwards said he "can't imagine retiring" from the electronics business he's built up here.

"I am having more fun now than I've ever had," he said. "I will probably drop dead in this office somewhere."

Extron designs and makes a slew of electronics, including devices that transmit data between computers and video projectors, switches, amplifiers and other signal processing devices.

It sells to specialized resellers that install and service what's called professional presentation displays used by government agencies, companies and schools.

Some of Extron's roughly 900 products also are used in video production studios and by broadcasters. Other niche markets include videoconferencing displays and home theaters.

History

Extron started in 1983 in Garden Grove. Its headquarters moved to Santa Fe Springs for a few years and then ended up in Anaheim in 1995.

Its earliest products were interfaces that would convert computer signals so that they could be received by a video projector.

The company has some 1,000 workers here and has sites in the Netherlands, Singapore, Japan, the United Arab Emirates and North Carolina.

Privately held Extron doesn't disclose sales. The Business Journal estimates Extron sees at least \$150 million in yearly sales.

The company doesn't do much advertising and its name isn't recognized by most consumers.

The bulk of its efforts, according to Edwards, goes into engineering.

"We are primarily an engineering-oriented company," he said. "All the companies that compete in our industry are 99% sales-oriented. Extron has a culture of engineering, education and training."

As for naming Extron's handful of competitors, Edwards "won't even go there."

The Business Journal pegs Rockleigh, N.J.-based Crestron Electronics Inc. and Cisco Systems Inc.'s Tandberg unit as among Extron's rivals.

Edwards hails from Wilson, N.C., east of Raleigh. While an engineering culture thrives at Extron, his background is in sales.

Early on, Edwards worked in sales management positions for companies that sold video projection gear for presentation systems as well as for airlines.

Much of his training has been on the job. Edwards has an associate of arts degree from Wilson Community College.

He spent six years with the North Carolina National Guard and attained the rank of specialist E5.

Edwards also owns Quextron Inc., a maker of software that helps labs and hospitals process specimens and billing and is based in Raleigh.

In and around Anaheim, Edwards has amassed a small empire.

He estimates the company has about 500,000 square feet of space that it either owns or leases in Orange County.

Extron has a factory near the Orange (57) Freeway where it assembles circuits, chips, transistors and other electronics onto printed circuit boards. It also tests the boards and puts them into finished products.

Plans

Next month the company plans to break ground on an expansion of its headquarters in Anaheim.

Like most corporate sites, Extron's headquarters is set to house engineering, product development, sales and marketing, inventory and other administrative functions.

But the roughly 200,000-square-foot building also will have a first-floor restaurant and concert venue tentatively dubbed The Ranch.

Edwards envisions the 18,000-square-foot space as an upscale steakhouse with space for country performers to play and for patrons to cut a rug.

As Edwards sees it, The Ranch could draw locals and tourists staying in the area because of Disneyland and the Anaheim Convention Center nearby.

“It’s not going to be a barn,” Edwards said. “There will be no sawdust on the floor.”

Edwards has been two-stepping with his daughter, now 23, since she was a preteen. He also met his fiancé on the dance floor.

“I always wanted to have the finest place in the world where we could dance,” Edwards said. “So, one of these days, I am going to have me the finest steakhouse and entertainment around here.”

Those days are near for Edwards, who has been working out plans for the restaurant for nearly three years. The Ranch is slated to open in the fall of 2011.

Building a restaurant from scratch at the new Extron headquarters made sense for Edwards, a hands-on manager.

“We can control it that way,” he said. “It will be done the way I want to do it.”

Although he’s a stranger to the restaurant business, Edwards isn’t daunted.

Skeptics have asked him, “What in the world do you want to be in the restaurant business for?” Edwards said.

“If you do things the right way, have good product and support your customer with good service, the people will come,” he said.

One thing’s for sure for Edwards: The Ranch “will have the finest sound system in all of California,” Edwards said. “I can’t wait to get on the dance floor.”