

# Functional Spaces

## Tech Valley Office Interiors

President/Founder  
Rod Dion

**Success Magazine:**  
Rod, what does success mean to you?

Rod Dion: Simply stated, it means that my company and staff are doing well, our bills are paid, and my family is taken care of.

**SM:** Why did you decide to open Tech Valley Office Interiors?

RD: After working for some local dealerships, who were wonderful companies in their own right, I felt there was a niche in the marketplace for a mid-market, budget-minded dealership where service and price would always come first. Based on our first four years of business, my speculation was right.

**SM:** Is this your first venture as an entrepreneur?

RD: Yes it is.

**SM:** What did you do for work prior to Tech Valley Office Interiors?

RD: Prior to starting Tech Valley Office Interiors, I spent fifteen years working in the healthcare field as a nurse, sales representative and General Manager for a national homecare company. I made a drastic career change in 1999 and went to work for a local office furniture dealership.

**SM:** How did your past experiences prepare you for success as a business owner?

RD: For many years I was very involved in local politics. There is no better training ground for opening a business than throwing your hat into the local political ring—it forces you to grow thick skin.

**SM:** How long has Tech Valley Office Interiors been in business?

**RD:** We opened for business January 5, 2005

**SM:** What were your goals when you first started, and how do they differ today?

RD: My initial goal was to make it through the first year. At that point, surviving one year seemed like the greatest challenge in the world. Our goals have actually not changed much since then; we work day to day to provide the best service at the fairest price we can, and the rest seems to take care of itself.

**SM:** In what ways has your company changed over the years?

RD: When I started the company, my only employee was my Operations Manager, Chris Southard, who is still with me today. Together we handled everything. Today we have eight full-time employees. Although I won't give up sales totally, I am not able to be as hands-on as I was during that first year.

**SM:** What has been the most rewarding aspect of owning your own business?

RD: Seeing the overall growth of the business, and how it has expanded beyond my dreams in such a short period of time.

**SM:** The most challenging?

RD: It goes without saying that the present economy is extremely challenging. But even through this downturn, we remain busy and positive.

**SM:** You recently furnished offices and waiting areas for the new Walt Disney Family Health Center in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. How did you get this job?

RD: We have been lucky to work with a national health care management company that builds health centers for large Fortune 500 companies. Our hard work and attention to detail have allowed us to grow with them, and become their provider of choice.

**SM:** How has this opportunity affected your business?

RD: Being able to state that you have done business with one of the most well branded companies in the world changes how customers see you. We certainly are no longer viewed as a local "start-up" company.

**SM:** How much of your work is done out of the area?

RD: We do, on average, three to four large projects outside the Tech Valley Region each year. In the past we have done work with Toyota in San Antonio Texas, BMW in South Carolina, and others. In an economy like the present one, we will go where ever profitable jobs can be found now that we are comfortable working outside the area.

**SM:** What accomplishment are you most proud of?

RD: During the first two and half years of starting the business there was no bal-



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**RD:** When customers ask for references, I believe I can hand over our entire customer list with confidence knowing, with only one or two exceptions, that all would give outstanding reviews of Tech Valley Office Interiors.

**SM:** You were recently named 2009 Board Chair for the Colonie Chamber of Commerce. What does this mean to you?

RD: On the day I filed my business papers four years ago, the very first thing I did was join the Colonie Chamber of Commerce. It is almost unbelievable to me that four years later, I have been given the privilege of helping a chamber that has been so supportive of my business. It is a position that I truly view as an honor.

**SM:** Why do you feel it is important to be involved in your community?

RD: It's how I was raised. If you involve yourself in your community, the community itself usually gives back. It's a win-win situation for everyone.

**SM:** An entrepreneur's schedule is typically a pretty arduous one. How do you maintain a sense of balance in your life?

RD: During the first two and half years

of starting the business there was no balance. Just about every hour of every day was based on Tech Valley Office Interiors. I am very lucky that my wife, Carolyn, fully understood the commitment needed to start a business, and helped relieve a lot of the day-to-day pressure on me. Considering that when I started the business my son was three and my daughter was one, it was not the best time to embark on a new venture. But we both knew if we didn't start it then we would never have done it. Today, with eight fantastic employees, I am able to devote a great deal more time to my family. This past year alone, we took a wonderful vacation to Disney World and we have started to ski as a family.

**SM:** How do you unwind during the most stressful times?

RD: I am a passionate skier, and try to find as much time as possible during the winter to get out on the slopes. I find that being outdoors with the fresh air and beautiful views really helps clear my head.

**SM:** To what personal characteristic do you attribute your success?

RD: That's a tough question. I guess I'm honest, blunt, and I don't play games with people. I like to think people and customers

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know they are always getting the best and fairest deal when they work with me.

**SM:** What makes Tech Valley Office Interiors unique in the industry?

RD: I founded the company on the basis of service, service, service, and we continue that today. We also keep our overhead low, so we can maintain our competitive prices.

**SM:** Who has been your role model throughout your life? Why?

RD: My father. He owned Dion Oil Company for over forty years and has been a great resource for me. During my childhood he was there for me no matter what, and that is a lesson I now try to implement with my children. He showed me what is truly important in life and that family always comes first.

**SM:** What do you enjoy most about living in the Capital Region?

RD: As someone who has moved a whole two miles from where I grew up, I have always loved this area. Of course having my family close is important, but so is the location. This area allows for a great deal of diversity within a few hours drive.