

# BUSINESS PROFILE

## SYSCON INC.

In the mid-1980s, personal and small office computing was still in its infancy.

The modern Internet had not come into being, “laptop” was not a household term and 10mg of memory cost \$1,000.

“That’s not even a high-resolution photograph on your phone now,” said Larry Wendt, founder of Hinsdale’s Syscon Inc.

Launched in 1986, Syscon’s 30 years of operation is reason to celebrate for co-owners Larry and Cathy Wendt and their staff. The company, after all, had its beginnings as a way to help support the couples’ instrumental music recording venture.

“We were living in DeKalb and Larry was finishing his master’s work in mathematical probability and statistics, and we needed a little bit more cash to continue with the (recording work),” Cathy said.

Larry was hired to help a local Sylvan Center owner design a computerized scheduling program.

Before long, Larry’s programming acumen caught the attention of an educational publishing house.

“We ended up being hired to do a pre-GED series that would run on Apple IIs, because at the time

that was what was at the prison and outreach centers for adults who would need pre-GED,” Cathy said.

Although avid musicians themselves, the Wendts realized technical support was the soundtrack of their future professionally.

A family connection in the construction industry opened doors to serve the IT needs of area contractors. And they also found a niche helping nonprofits upgrade their networks.

Larry had no formal training in computers but said his background in physics and math along with an aptitude for problem-solving served him well in the early years.

“We could actually do it all. We could install a network, because they were very simple at that time. We could install software and understand it pretty rapidly,” he said. “The amount of hardware options were very limited. It was a much simpler world.”

Among Syscon’s more memorable clients was the faith-based organization World Relief.

“I actually went to Africa for a month with them to implement some technology in Rwanda and Mozambique right after the Rwandan genocide. So it was a pretty tense time,” Larry related.

Cathy said the most effective technicians today are those who can marry a computer science degree with a head for business and trouble-shooting.

That approach informed their efforts to equip veterinarians with better communication between their main offices and remote sites.

“Before we knew it we had a pretty good list of clients who were all in that business arena,” Cathy said.

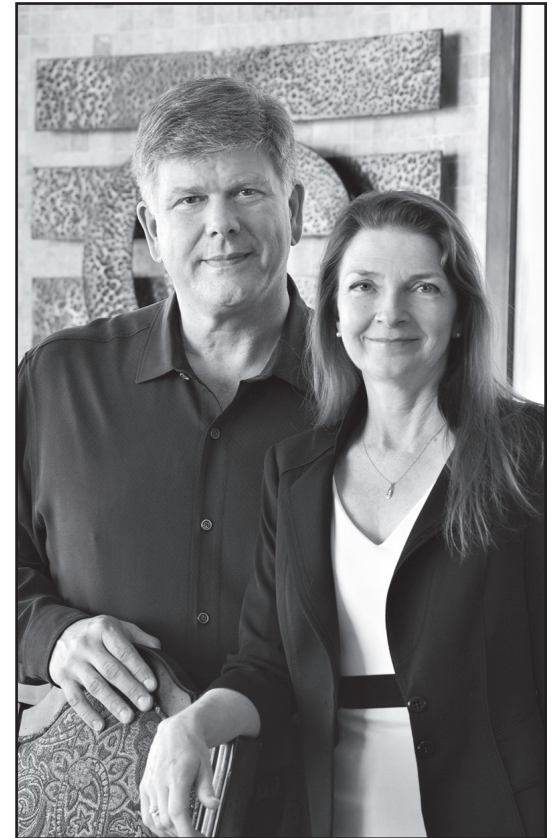
Shifts to network-based computing, remote computing and, most recently, cloud-based computing has tested Syscon’s adaptability. Instead of offering pure support, the company now hosts many of its clients servers.

“That is a tremendously different business model,” Larry said.

As steeped in dazzling technology as the Wendts are, Cathy admitted to moments of marveling. Stuck in Louisville during a snowstorm recently, she was still able to help the company’s new controller get the payroll out.

“I put my cellphone on hot spot, took out my computer and connected to our server (in Hinsdale),” she said. “You have to be creative, but at least there are options.”

— by Ken Knutson



Cathy Wendt and her husband, Larry, are celebrating 30 years in business with their Syscon Inc. IT support and services firm, located in Hinsdale. “The industry has changed so much in the last 30 years that every day is a new challenge,” Larry said. (Jim Slonoff photo)

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