

TEXTING

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feature, Interop grew quickly throughout North America. So quickly, in fact, that it needed a bigger building. It moved down the street to a new headquarters, off a busy stretch of Daniels Parkway, near Interstate 75. (The company also recently opened an office in Guatemala City.)

"The move was necessitated by consistent growth in the company's sales, as well as expansion into Latin America," spokeswoman Judith Purcell said. "Interop Technologies has doubled its revenue each year since the company was launched."

Interop is one of a handful of businesses worldwide which creates software and hardware for text messaging, but also ringtones, picture messaging, mobile internet access, and other now common cell-phone features. They sell the services to wireless cell-phone operators such as Metro PCS, AT&T and Verizon, but also to companies like Hershey's who might have various in-house communications needs. Every day, millions of the text messages are routed across town or across the country, through a roomful of computer equipment still housed in Interop's former headquarters: a relatively cramped hurricane proof building with 11 inch thick concrete walls in South Fort Myers.

Jim Dwyer said he never expected what was once a dream of increased communication to gain this kind of widespread popularity. (Worldwide, 1.9 trillion text messages were sent last year.)

Interop's new 60,000-square-foot building, besides being enormous (Interop plans to use only the top floor, 20,000 square feet, for its offices) was designed, constructed, then furnished by three separate Fort Myers based companies. However, there is something unassuming about the place, sitting dwarfed by a large field which the company also owns.

Dwyer's other son, Jim Dwyer III, CEO of Talamh Associates, the commercial real estate developer for the company's new building, said the location is an ideal mid-point between workers commutes from Naples or Port Charlotte; it's also designed to be something special that will stand the test of time, in a Fort Myers that he said is no longer a sleepy little community. He's glad to have moved on from the small space the company paid its dues in.

"I have been working in this building for four days now and I can tell you from personal experience that it's an excellent place to work," he said.

John Dwyer agrees. "For some reason, legitimacy starts with the front door," he said. "I've learned over time that we really needed to up the quality of the facility and that's why we did it. I'm just really thrilled and I'm proud of the fact that we grew it organically. We created the business and now we've earned the building. It's part of the puzzle for the next level of play."

Sazama said the new location is also necessary because he's recruiting for all the new positions the company needs: network engineering, software development, database administration, quality assurance and project management.

"That's what I did all morning; interview people," he said last Thursday when Jim Dwyer cut the ribbon in front of the new offices.

Bill Wavrin, Executive Chef of Dwyer's restaurant in South Fort Myers - the family's other business venture - was at this opening celebration of the breathy, marbled headquarters. In his chef jacket, he plated hor'dourves before the festivities began, including one called, "A date with a pig under a tomato blanket."

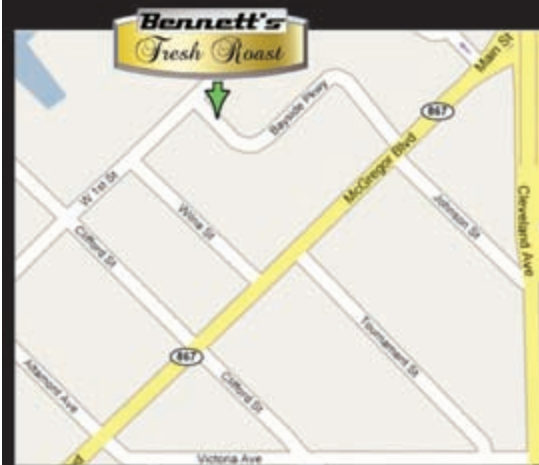
The grand new digs won't cause Interop to lose sight of its purpose, Sazama said. "We can't live off the laurels of this building. We've got to provide quality service, solutions and deliver what our customers are asking for." ■

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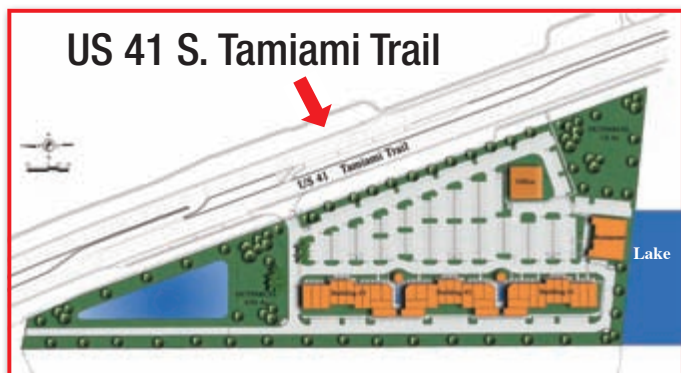


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