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**Small Tree Communications**

**By Erika Frederick**

CHIPPEWA FALLS – The re-emergence of Apple Computers as a force in information technology is a story most people know. What's less well known is how companies that work with Apple are succeeding, too.

Small Tree Communications was launched three years ago by a group of high-performance networking engineers who pooled their talents and pursued an opportunity to produce some of the best hardware in the Apple market space.

President Corky Seeber was one of Small Tree's six founders and is among the five who have stayed to see the Wisconsin company succeed in the competitive world of high-performance networking products.

Seeber and his fellow founders are all super-computer designers who previously worked together and decided the Apple market needed added expertise. They were also impressed with the cult-like customer dedication in the Apple market, and felt that since it was smaller in size it was the perfect opportunity for them to show their skills and create high-performance products.

Small Tree products offer solutions to a variety of enterprise computing environments. According to Seeber, the products are designed to help businesses succeed.

"In computers it is all about going faster," Seeber explained. "We are providing users with the capability to do things they weren't able to do before."

With a variety of products from Ethernet adapters to new InfiniBand technology, Small Tree has made a name for itself in the Apple market. According to Seeber, their multiport Ethernet Adapters are among their most popular products because they are cheaper and are used by a wider range of consumers.

Small Tree's InfiniBand technology is the highest performing product in the Apple market space, Seeber explained. It won the Apple Design Award in 2005.

Small Tree's success to this point hasn't come easy. It began with a search for funding, and Seeber explained they were lucky enough to present their business plan to angel investors and eventually receive funding through them.

"Presenting to angel investors was one of the toughest things I have ever done in my life. You build a presentation on your business plan and they come back to you with areas of improvements and ways to make it better. It is a tough process," Seeber said.

Seeber said Small Tree first presented to the angel investors in March 2004 and then were asked to have a conference call with Apple to ensure the angels that Apple really did know Small Tree

and wanted to work with them. It was not until after four additional presentations and many modifications to its business plan that Small Tree received funding in February 2005.

Located in Oakdale, Minn. and Chippewa Falls, Wis., Small Tree is in the middle of a very talented pool of people in regards to the technology industry, according to Seeber.

“I always tell people that this area is the Super Computer Valley of the United States,” Seeber said.

Small Tree is looking to capitalize on that talent and continue to expand their market reach in the Apple business as well as federal defense-related activities, Seeber said. The company is also looking to switch from a direct sales mode to more of a distribution or reseller channel because they need more hands-on support and a sophisticated, confident sales force.

Seeber said he and his Small Tree colleagues are excited about the future.

“Even though Small Tree was founded in 2003 I feel like this is something I have been working on for 20 years,” Seeber said. “You can move so much faster as a small start-up than everyone around you and you have to wait for others. Things take longer to grow than you want, but eventually they do.”

*Frederick is a UW-Madison student enrolled in “Issues in Science and Technology Communication,” a course taught by Wisconsin Technology Council President Tom Still.*

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