

In The Beginning: Sealevel Celebrates 25 Years

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Sealevel Systems, Inc., proudly celebrated 25 years of innovative, reliable hardware and software products to enable computer connectivity and control with a day-long event that included an employee appreciation lunch and an open house for customers and partners.

As a cofounder of the company, I have many great memories from the early days at Sealevel. 1986 was an amazing year for our family, a year of big adjustments and changes. Tom was working for Adams Incorporated, a textile equipment manufacturer. I launched a new career selling real estate after being a “stay at home” mom for ten years.

We all looked like 1986. The movie Top Gun inspired my Kelly McGillis haircut. Tom wore his shaded aviator glasses with his hair shorter than it had ever been.

Early in ’86 Adams decided to close its doors due to the failing textile industry. Tom had developed some communications products while he was there and decided he could build a company around those products.

I was 29 years old, and he had just turned 31. Tom went to his father, Dr. J. T. O’Hanlan, and asked to borrow money for us to live off of while we got started. He was happy to help. We also approached banker, Rodger Anthony, who was with First National Bank of Pickens County, and he agreed to work with us.

I ended my very short real estate career, dusted off my Smith-Corona typewriter I used in college and Tom found us a spot in the basement of a friend’s business. All we needed was a name and logo. Naming the company came from a combination of things, music being one of them, and the logo was designed by my mother, Mary Jane Dull, who had just finished a masters degree in sculpting and painting from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Tom developed products, talked to customers, worked with vendors and suppliers and tested the products. I typed invoices, paid the bills and did the shipping and receiving. Ben and Sarah, along with the help of neighborhood kids, built boxes and helped organize shipping on the weekends. With lots of support of friends and family, we were off and running. I had absolute faith in Tom and never considered failing as an option.

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The stories of that first year are endless. I answered the phone and we passed it back and forth, often changing our voices to sound as if we had more employees. I used my maiden name so that we didn't sound like a "Mom and Pop" business. We used invoices that came from the office supply store, and I typed in our company name and information until we could afford business cards and invoices with our name and new logo.

Obviously, the company has grown and has been very successful. We grew slowly, taking seriously every step as we added employees and new products. Tom and I worked together for thirteen years with our roles in the company evolving. I still consider him an amazing engineer and visionary. He has always been passionate about technology.

Our children joined the company after college and working other jobs. First Sarah, now Sarah Beasley, is Director of Marketing. Ben followed, now Chief Operating Officer, running the company on the day-to-day. And we added a son to our family during the high school years, Brandon Maddox, who is Shipping and Receiving Manager. I am really proud of Ben, Sarah, and Brandon roles in a company their father and I built, which they continue to build. It is hard for families to work together and not something everyone can do. It can be challenging and not for the weak at heart.

Through the years, the company has re-located several times to larger facilities to accommodate industry demands. Our current campus on Highway 93 in Liberty houses our design, sales, support and manufacturing in a 48,000 square foot facility. With the addition of several new Department of Defense contracts, we recently underwent a major expansion to allow space for future operations and additional warehouse areas. To prevent static electricity damage to electronic equipment, Sealevel installed over 15,000 sq. ft. of state-of-the-art electrostatic discharge (ESD) tiling, and 5,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space was converted to manufacturing and office space.

We have struggled through the economy along with the rest of the country, but seem to be seeing the "light at the end of the tunnel". We have great employees that are very talented and loyal, some that have been with us for over 15 years. Our suppliers, partners and distributors are part of our Sealevel family. We feel very blessed. Today, I am proud to say that I have the same faith in my children leading the future of Sealevel that I have had in Tom since we opened Sealevel Systems, Incorporated in May of 1986.

I would like to toast our family and friends, employees both past and present, our vendors and suppliers, and all of those we have encountered on this wonderful journey. To 25 years of Sealevel, I say thank you.

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