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Young Guns 2000

Paul Helmick

President and CEO, CornerStone Technology Group
Executive Vice-President of Central City Online dba EZNET

“Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent . . .” The words that Paul Helmick, a young Boy Scout in Troop 250, learned years ago still roll off his tongue with an inspiring cadence. Today Paul holds to these same principles, but applies them in a high-tech business world quite different from the West Virginia mountains that he hiked and explored growing up. Paul is widely regarded as one of West Virginia’s business leaders helping to bring people and technology closer together.

Paul established himself as a leader in the development of West Virginia’s technology industry when he co-founded CityNet Corporation in 1994, which has grown to be the state’s largest ISP. He served as president of CityNet from its inception to 1997 and values the experience of managing and leading high-growth companies. Paul has degrees in computer science and electronic engineering from WV State College. His career has taken him through programming software for the coal industry, distinguished military service in tactical communications and resulted in several advanced technical certifications as well as being a recognized public speaker on topics of technology.

“Starting and growing a business at an early age grows you up fast—I count these experiences and relationships as foundational to the perspective I have today.” Paul smiles about “literally starting on the kitchen table,” when he thinks of the companies he has founded, Spectrum Technologies in 1990, CityNet in 1994, DataCorp Communications in 1996. “My wife, Sara, jokes that I’m a bit of a packrat. We just donated that kitchen table to Goodwill this past week . . . I’m a bit nostalgic and it’s one of the hardest things I’ve done all year.”

In December of 1999, Central City Online dba EZNET acquired the CornerStone Technology Group. Following CityNet, Paul had joined CornerStone (formerly MicroAge of Charleston) to serve as the Vice President of Marketing & Business Development. In less than 2 ½ years, in January of 2000, Paul was asked to serve as President and CEO of the CornerStone Technology Group as well as the Executive Vice-President of EZNET.

CornerStone specializes in providing professional consulting and network and system integration services, as well as internet-related applications and communication solutions for advanced voice, video, and data networks. Central City Online is a regional Integrated Communications Provider whose recent acquisitions of West Virginia wireless broadband, telecom, and network integration firms make the firm the largest private technology company in the state with over 100 employees.

“These mergers have created a new type of company that can serve clients in incredible new ways. We have a fantastic group of shareholders and board to work for. But it takes good people’s effort, energy, time and trust to bring something like this together. We have a great team focused on a clear mission: To help organizations use technology to improve their business.”

Paul’s reputation has allowed him to contribute on an international level through representing West Virginia technology opportunities to a number of foreign companies investing in West Virginia businesses. JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) and the West Virginia Governor’s Office of Technology, led by Dr. Sam Tulley and Mark Lowdermilk, in conjunction with the West Virginia Development Office, traveled to Japan this past July. Paul and his wife Sara were part of the delegation on that trade mission representing technology business leaders working to establish international technology business opportunities in West Virginia and Japan.

“Trust is the foundation for communication and understanding. It’s often the harder choice, but it is the key ingredient to effective individuals, teams and companies.”

Paul is emphatic that these successes have only been possible with the strong support of exceptional individuals. “A big part of who I am comes from those around me who have challenged, supported, coached and counseled me in this journey. It is a tremendous honor and privilege to work again with people for the second and third time—quite a story of a team working and staying together.”

Paul is insistent in recognizing the team of influential people that have been in his life: “David Lowe’s wisdom and discernment, and Loren Claypool’s example of self-management and interpersonal leadership really shaped my thinking about business and management. Thomas Loehr and Anthony Mazelon, early venture capital partners, introduced invaluable financial insight and discipline. CityNet’s co-founders, Mark Burdette, a selfless, clear thinker, committed to quality relationships and results, and Rob White with his visionary ideas and drive. Troy Young has always delivered rock-solid technical solutions and has the ability to solve almost any problem. And, last but not least, Mary Sue Helmick, a friend, a professional, a mother who has anchored a young team of entrepreneurs with her maturity, experience and professionalism and greatly contributed to our collective success.”

Paul’s strong business acumen, credibility and enthusiasm inspire trust and confidence. He feels accountable to keep focused on service to others, whether they are customers, employees or shareholders. Paul hopes to someday start a venture capital fund for kids and support younger entrepreneurs’ need to grow, develop and be rewarded right here in West Virginia. “I am very careful what I choose to be involved in. Faith and family come first. Life is so precious and so short. Only where a meaningful contribution can be made will I be found. I believe in the greater possibilities and potential of every person and moment. Trust and teamwork are the keys. Life expects a certain amount of achievement—it demands lasting contribution.”