

Successful computer startup has a Cinderella story— and a mission

The "C" in C&V Technologies of Louisiana refers to company CEO and President Calvin Mills. But considering the company's inspiring rags-to-riches story, the "C" could also stand for "Cinderella."

C&V is a full-service information technology firm offering wholesale and retail desktop and laptop computers, servers, hardware, wireless and wired LAN networking devices and installation, and computer-related education. Started just six years ago with a \$1,000 investment, C&V has since posted revenues of \$500,000 and taken home two major awards.

Adding to the Cinderella saga, C&V is a business with a heart for the underdog. It grew out of Mills' goal of bridging the "digital divide" separating society's least affluent citizens from the benefits of information technology.

There's a definite storybook aspect to Mills and his company: even if the former Southern University full-back with the all-business attitude bears no resemblance to a prince. Plus, there was no magic spell behind Mills' success. Try "patience, focus and diligence." Those are the words Mills uses to describe the struggle to bring C&V to life.

Mills was raised in a rough New Orleans neighborhood by a single mother who made "huge sacrifices" so her son could attend a private Catholic high school. There he met the late Sen. John Hinkle, who gave him a summer job in the State Senate. Mills has been involved with politics ever since, counting Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden and Mills' godmother, Senate President Pro Tem Diane E. Bujala among his influential advisors.

While working in sales and management at electronic chain stores after college, Mills was troubled by families he met there who couldn't afford a computer. Believing he could build more affordable PCs, Mills teamed up with electrical engineer Valdet Gant, a best friend from college, who became the "V" in C&V.

C&V TECHNOLOGIES

Special Advertising Feature



AT A GLANCE

Primary production/service:
**COMPUTER HARDWARE AND
SOFTWARE CONSULTING**

Top local executive:
CALVIN F. MILLS, JR.

No. of local employees: **5**

Year founded: **2001**

Web site: **www.cvtechnologiesla.com**

Phone: **(225) 924-3791**

Fax: **(225) 341-3815**

C&V was founded on the principle that everyone, regardless of background or income, should have access to quality computers, as well as to the software, training and other services to make the most of their computer experience. EduTech, C&V's nonprofit division, also provides math, science and computer-related training to underprivileged youth. "We are a for-profit company with a nonprofit mission," Mills says.

The partners' first for-profit job—a network for a small business—netted a \$1,000 return. Mills and Gant used that to start C&V.

The first couple of years were tough and so. Then Hurricane Katrina struck and C&V was asked to set up a call center for the Louisiana State Black Legislative Caucus. On the advice of caucus members, Mills applied to be a FEMA vendor. That eventually resulted in a \$350,000 contract to supply computers and other items to FEMA & other agencies.

"Five of us worked 24 hours a day delivering products around the state," says Mills. At the time, C&V was headquartered in Mills' two-bedroom apartment—along with 12 evacuated family members.

For its performance under pressure, C&V later received the Department of Homeland Security's Small Business Outstanding Performance Award, LSU's Small Business Development Center, which advised C&V during its formation, has also recognized the IT firm with its Client of the Year Award.

Landing the FEMA contract proved a major turning point. The little startup received its first small business loan of \$20,000 from Liberty Bank and Trust—then amazed loan officers by repaying it in four days. C&V was hired by Dillard University in New Orleans to set up a wireless network on campus. Other network clients include Southern University and Louisiana Technical College.

"Hardware and software are still the main part of our business," Mills notes, "but networking has also become a big part of what we do." C&V also consults with other companies interested in winning government contracts. "Our goal over the next six years is to do at least \$5 million in revenue while expanding our services for low-income clients," Mills adds. "This is my way of giving back. In order to receive blessings, you've got to give blessings." ■