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Reaching for the 'Treeline'

Entrepreneur expands the size of his business

By Joanne Senders

Correspondent

Trees cannot survive above an altitude called the "treeline," but Treeline Inc., the sales recruiting firm owned by lifelong Reading resident Dan Fantasia, is not only surviving but growing at an amazing rate. Last Thursday, Treeline held an open house at its new, larger, headquarters at Lakeside Office Park in Wakefield.

Only five short years ago, Fantasia started Treeline by himself in a small office.

"I had no clients, no candidates, nothing but the telephone and myself," he said. But despite this, he showed up every day in a suit and tie.

"If I'm going to do this I'm going to be serious," Fantasia told himself at the time.

In five years, Treeline has become the fastest growing executive search firm in New England. It specializes in placing sales professionals in the biotech/pharmaceutical/medical device, high tech and business-to-business markets. Today, Treeline has almost 90 clients.

Fantasia received his Bachelor of Science degree from U Mass Amherst, studying architecture. His first job was as a sales person for a cad/cam company, where he became the company's youngest general manager. Looking for another opportunity he went to an executive search firm. Instead of placing him in another position they asked him to join their firm as a recruiter.

"I knew architecture wasn't for me. My personality is more outgoing," said Fantasia. The risk was great, however, since the position was 100 percent commissions. "But I had a great time, a great experience and a lot of success."

In his first full year, he was the company's number three performer and by the second year he was its number one performer and, he said, he became a managing partner in record time.

"Unfortunately, the business model broke down and I decided to explore new options," said Fantasia, and so he decided to start his own recruitment company.

"In our business, there is a lot of selfishness. It's not my belief. It's not who I am," said Fantasia. He explained because he had signed a one year noncompete clause he would not recruit in high tech and he left all his clients and candidates behind. Instead he just started calling and introducing himself to companies and he eventually made inroads with several pharmaceutical companies. Fantasia said Treeline is now the number one preferred vendor in New England for Forrest Pharmaceuticals.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Treeline team celebrates a last hurrah in its original office space shortly before the move to its new, larger location. Front row left to right, Kathleen Mauriot, Kimberly Collins, and Dan Fantasia. Back row left to right, David DeMelo, Jerry Rago, Kristin Vose, David Stewart, and Noah Goldstein.

And then came Sept. 11 and the war. But, said Fantasia, "we came through all those challenges. When all those companies were downsizing we were growing."

"The whole idea," he said, "is to add value. We've helped a lot of good candidates find good companies."

And Fantasia takes care of his employees too. Generally recruitment positions are 100 percent commission but Fantasia pays his employees a base salary. And by the time his fourth employee was hired he had 401K and health care plans in place.

"If it's important to me I know it's important to employees. We believe in that stuff," said Fantasia.

Treeline currently has 11 consultants but plans to have

17 by the end of this year and 35 by the end of 2007, which is why Treeline has expanded its office space from 1,500 square feet to its current 4,100 square feet.

Fantasia said with Treeline being privately held with good cash flow, "we're in a good position for continued growth. Our plan is to grow nationally. We're going for it."

In addition to being CEO of Treeline, Fantasia recently became involved with the Leadership Committee of Boston's Dana Faber Cancer Institute and is helping to plan events that will raise money for cancer research and treatment.

Fantasia lives in Reading with his wife and two children.