

WHITESTONE GROUP INC.

Business: Provides government and commercial asset protection and security officers.
Based: Columbus **CEO:** John D. Clark Sr.
Total employees: 400 **Area employees:** 65
2009 revenue: Would not disclose
Website: whitestonegroup.us



JANET ADAMS | BUSINESS FIRST
 Whitestone Group CEO John Clark Sr.

PROFILE

Security needs have led growth, but firm's foundation enabled it

BY SCOTT RAWDON | FOR BUSINESS FIRST

Why was this company started?

Whitestone Group Inc. CEO John Clark Sr. back in 2000 noticed a void in the number of quality security officers and investigators available to commercial and government customers.

Clark, who had experience in business and law enforcement, believed he could create a leading federal government security company.

"I was positive that Whitestone's services would be embraced by customers and appreciated by law enforcement," he said.

He presented his vision to management at a large Cincinnati corporation and convinced them to hire Whitestone to manage their security.

Soon after, 9/11 happened.

"Whitestone was too new into the market to tap into the rapidly created Homeland Security projects," he said.

But the company quickly expanded to provide security and investigative services to other large companies. In 2004, the company expanded further into government contracts and in 2005 was able to land business related to Hurricane Katrina.

What dangers are in growing too quickly?

Clark sees no dangers in growing too quickly.

"Even in the early stages of company development, Whitestone experienced aggressive growth," he said.

One of Clark's first objectives was to hire seasoned talent that could navigate a new company's growing pains, he said.

Whitestone's key personnel provided the company with a solid foundation, he said, that prevented any problems associated with rapid growth.

"Adhering to solid, good business practices ensures stability and successful problem resolution at any level," he said.

Years from now, what do you think you'll tell people about the Great Recession?

"Hard economic times actually created a period of opportunity for Whitestone," Clark said.

As the Great Recession loomed, Clark said Whitestone was in good financial shape with tremendous support from a local community bank. With the bank's help, he said the company avoided many of the financial nightmares other small companies faced and continued to grow steadily.

He said he'd tell people that particularly during down times, customers look for the maximum value for their money— not necessarily the least expensive.

"They hire well-trained professionals and well-organized services that will share their vision for the future," he said. "It's about customer satisfaction, and customers recognize that quality."

Given the time and the tuition, what class would you take to shore up your expertise?

"I'd like to learn more about the concepts of strategic planning and corporate positioning," Clark said.

Did you know any entrepreneurs growing up?

Entrepreneurs raised Clark.

"As a young man, I was integrated into the family business — a restaurant in Cincinnati owned by my parents," he said.

He graduated from a private military academy and joined the military during the Vietnam era.

"I believe that built my foundation for the leadership and disciplinary skills required to own and operate my own business," he said.

He later worked as a marketing representative for a furniture manufacturer, where he met mentors who he credits with teaching him the importance of customer service.

SCOTT RAWDON is a freelance writer.

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