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## Eidos seeks to expand ergonomic products for vehicle repairmen's use

by Richard D. Brown

Lincoln-based Eidos Corp., which in six years has turned the corner with its ergonomically designed products that are used by major aircraft manufacturers, plans to expand its product line to target the needs of maintenance workers in auto dealerships and body shops.

"The broadening of our products could represent 50 percent of our annual revenues within five years and triple the size of our company," President-CEO Stu Rafos said.

Eidos, which was founded in 1986, is a privately owned firm. The founder, Dr. David Rudolph of David City, is one of its directors.

The eight employees work in 8,000 square feet at 4755 N. 48th St. Assembly, sales and marketing of its 10 ergonomically designed chairs, which are used by airline maintenance personnel working on military and domestic planes throughout the U.S., is done in-house. Manufacturing is contracted to TMCO's plant in Lincoln.

Rafos said about 90 percent of Eidos' revenue is generated by the sale of chairs. The rest consists of parts sales and maintenance of equipment.

Rudolph, a general practitioner, had been treating patients who had neck and back injuries caused by maintenance jobs. At about that time the Cessna aircraft plant in Wichita was seeking equipment to reduce employees' injuries and to cut workers' compensation claims.

The maintenance chairs, which are typically used in hangars, cost \$135 to \$1,500, depending on the size and special features.

"We have two products which are designed for outdoor use, such as in servicing the rolling stock in the Nebraska rail yards of Union Pacific and Burlington Northern," Rafos said.

Although Eidos has an industrial engineer on its staff, the firm works with the engineering departments of major customers such as Cessna, Learjet, McDonnell Douglas, Boeing and Martin-Marietta in formulating product designs and adapting the equipment to specific needs.

Service chairs made of 12-gauge steel, which feature foam padding and a seat that goes up and down nearly two feet, are being used to perform maintenance on Stealth bombers in Iraq and throughout the world. Adjustable head rests and holders for toolboxes are popular features.

Rafos said the Air Force has ordered more than twice its usual number of chairs over the past three years.

"They are being used by personnel at bases such as Offutt where B-52s are serviced," Rafos said. "Overall, thousands of our chairs are being used to service B-15s, B16s and other fighter planes."

Eidos products are used at Seattle's Boeing plant, where hydraulic pumping equipment adjusts seat height. Back and neck supports are important in keeping workers ergonomically safe when they are under the fuselage of an airplane.

Heavy industry's uses for Eidos-designed equipment include under-body work on earth moving equipment at Caterpillar and John Deere plants and facilities owned by Kawasaki and Goodyear.

"Customers have told us that the costs of our products can be financially justified within six months," Rafos said.

He said at the Wichita Cessna plant over a two-year period workers' compensation claims on back and neck injuries were cut 75 percent while productivity increased 5 percent.

"I use the word chair, but in industry the products we design and sell are known as work positioners," Rafos said.



Rafos in the assembly area with some of the company's seating products ... "The broadening of our products could represent 50 percent of our annual revenues within five years and triple the size of our company."

"The equipment we replace in some plants is wooden boxes that were used by people working on their knees and discarded office chairs that were broken and wrapped with 10 rolls of duct tape to look like new."

Instrumental in increasing the fortunes of Eidos, in addition to more military spending, is the emphasis on ergonomics in American industry over the past five years, Rafos said.

The firm also has been producing new products which are lower in price. Rafos said seven of Eidos' products have not drawn significant competitors.

"The light-line versions of products we are developing will sell for less and will appeal to the cost-conscious light industrial market, especially body shops and auto dealers," Rafos said.

In addition to five sales offices, Eidos uses 15 independent distributors to promote its products in 30 states. The dealer network is responsible for contacts with manufacturers, and employees of the Lincoln office handle the military accounts.

"As ergonomic and safety issues become more important, I'm not concerned about our ability to grow this company," Rafos said. "The investors have stuck with us. We also have been helped by our 10-year relationship with U.S. Bank and our partnership with UNL's Department of Mechanical Engineering."

Faculty talent has been tapped to answer questions, and students have been given troubleshooting assignments.

Rafos said the research and product development investment of the firm's seven original investors was being challenged up to about seven years ago, when sales were falling short of projections.

Rafos took over the top office at Eidos six years ago, and

the fortunes of the firm were reversed through emphasis on strategic planning and broadening the appeal of its products.

"The founders were 10 years too early," Rafos said. "At the time, they were trying to sell in an industry which didn't know the meaning of the term ergonomics."

Rafos, who is one of the owners of Eidos, graduated in 1970 from Wanger College in New York City with a degree in economics. He received an MBA in 1973.

After starting his career with Ingersoll-Rand in domestic and international sales, in 1980 he was recruited to be president and CEO of FWD Inc., a Wisconsin-based manufacturer of fire trucks and military vehicles.

He came to Lincoln in 1988 as a recruit from Outboard Marine to run the Cushman plant. In 1992, when he was a business consultant specializing in the buying and selling of companies, he was directed by a client to Eidos' needs.

"It was a niche business, and we tried not to attract attention to its problems but rather to grow the product line," Rafos said.

He and his wife, Judi, live in Walton. They have three grown children.

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