

Where is the faith in your workplace?

PRAYER HAS A PLACE IN NEW BUSINESS

BY SHARON LITTLE

FORT WAYNE
Old-fashioned values and longtime friendships are very much at the heart of two businesses opening in Fort Wayne.

Michael Westrick, chief executive officer of Energy Alternative, a 21st century-style business oriented toward energy savings and supplementation, says those chosen for key management positions are all "good Christian men, a good group."

At the suggestion of one of the group, Steve DiRenzo, the five men open their planning meetings with prayer, just as they did Tuesday when they met to discuss the Oct. 1 opening of the first Energy Alternative store on West Washington Center Road.

DiRenzo, Westrick's brother-in-law, is president; he and his family relocated from Wisconsin to Fort Wayne to be part of the new venture which, Westrick says, includes the opening in 2003 of two additional Energy Alternative stores in the Fort Wayne area. Like Westrick, his wife and sons, DeRenzo and his family are parishioners at St. Vincent de Paul Parish, where he

also is a member of the Christ Renews His Parish team.

Others involved are Sam Horner, vice president, sales; Tom Bowser, vice president, marketing; and Don Westrick, Mike's second cousin, vice president, procurement.

The business they are opening will be a retail outlet for "high-efficiency lighting," controls that balance heating and cooling in a home, and others that turn lights off in unoccupied rooms as well as various solar-powered devices. The latter, Michael Westrick explains, will include not only the familiar walkway lights but also solar-powered attic fans, house signs, water fountains, even shingles for outdoor sheds.

The energy supplementation aspect of the business relates to "devices to power your home," including solar roof panels and wind turbines that generate electricity. Other equipment, according to Michael, will be capable of "taking the electricity generated by solar panels or wind turbines and reflecting it back into the home."

The business is the first of its kind in the Fort Wayne area and

Michael, a Purdue University engineering graduate, is excited about its potential in an increasingly energy-conscious culture.

But he's enthused also about his second new business, Exotic Performance Plus, that has been open two weeks now at 2639 Goshen Road. This endeavor focuses on maintenance of "high-line automobiles," or sports cars, and it evolves out of Michael's longtime hobby of working on cars, particularly sports cars.

Robert Beam, a "guy I went to high school with," and John Beam are in charge of this business. Bob Beam and Michael Westrick have been close friends, including best man in each other's weddings, and the Beams, Michael said, reflect the honesty and high degree of integrity that he looks for in management personnel. "They are hard-working, good people," he says of Bob and John.

Michael and wife Jean have three sons, Andrew, 13, Alex, 12, and Josh, 8. Michael says he grew up with "good role models" in his parents, Joan and David Westrick, also members of St. Vincent de Paul Parish. The family, which included three boys and a girl, were then members of St. Therese Parish.

"My father taught me good work ethic and the value of a good day's work and the pride that comes with your accomplishments," Michael explains.

David Westrick also saw the importance of involvement in parish life and today Michael and his wife are "home couples" in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program, sharing knowledge of their faith over a period of time with other couples preparing to become Catholic. They have learned in the process "to defend our faith and answer questions about what we believe as Catholics, about the rich history of the church," Michael says.

The couple's three sons attend St. Vincent de Paul School and Michael says that while "there

are no guarantees," he and his wife trust that "we're giving them as good a chance as possible to learn proper values."

The older boys, he says, "listen in on the dinner table conversations my wife and I have" on current topics, including the situations involving corporate leaders being charged with dishonest and unethical business dealings.

"They pick up on a lot of this, and they also understand there are good and bad people and that sometimes people make very poor decisions," Michael says.

The values he prizes — "the integrity of an individual, the underlying character of a person" — are to be found in the men he has chosen to be involved in the new businesses. "These gentlemen are all hard-working individuals and, just as important, they are men of character, guided by their conscience and always striving to do the right thing," he explains.

In the corporate situations that have received media attention in recent months, Michael says, "it does happen that there are folk who don't do the right thing. I have always believed that truth will prevail. Unfortunately," he says, today "there's a sense of moral relativism that has convoluted what used to be a conscience. People sometimes can't discern between ethics and morality — they blur that line. And if you blur the line enough times, all of a sudden you lose your compass."

The men joining together in Energy Alternative, he says, have long supported one another, and in the process have developed a compass for one another. "We pray for each other when things are tough, sending e-mails" when they can't get together personally. One in particular has had to deal with many difficult family-related situations, and prayers have been an important support, according to Michael.

Guiding him and the men who are friends as well as business

Comments from the partners . . .

"It's our opinion that as Christians we're called upon to be different than the world, and to lead our life — business, pleasure or spiritual — is all rolled into one. The purpose for our lives on earth is to glorify God . . . he's the motivation and reason, no matter what we do."

— Don Westrick

"We're Christian men . . . in a business venture that we pray will succeed . . . we are Christian family, we're Energy Alternatives family and we're not unlike a number of businesses that have stresses of daily life, personal and business stresses. We're so much stronger together as Christians professing our faith in our workplace . . . the fact is we're on common ground. . . We didn't come thinking we would pray before and after every meeting, but when we started doing it we got so many more good graces than we ever thought we would."

— Steve DiRenzo

"It does happen that there are folk who don't do the right thing. I have always believed that truth will prevail. . . . To have employees follow your lead, you have to be honest and have to do what's right."

— Michael Westrick

partners is the knowledge, Michael says, that "to have employees follow your lead you have to be honest and have to do what's right. That old saying (is right) that 'what goes around does indeed come around.' People know if you're trying to do the right thing."



PHOTOS BY SHARON LITTLE

The top management of "The Energy Alternative," an energy-related retail store unique in Fort Wayne, happily smile as they plan for their Oct. 1 opening at 101 W. Washington Center Road. The men, who start their meetings with prayer (photo at right) and believe in incorporating strong Christian values in the workplace. Partners are, from left above, Sam Horner, Don Westrick, Michael Westrick, Tom Bowser and Steve DiRenzo.

