

TECHTROL INC.

TechTrol provides high-tech element to life in rural Pawnee

Drive into the north-central Oklahoma community of Pawnee, and reminders of the city's frontier history are everywhere. The town of about 2,500 people is noted for its ties to the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show and is the home to the Pawnee Bill State Park and Museum. It hosts an annual celebration of antique steam-powered farm machines and also is home to Chester Gould, creator of the Dick Tracy comic strip.

The city even takes its name from the Pawnee tribe that was relocated to the area in the 1870s. Pawnee also is home to one of the state's cutting-edge, high-tech companies in TechTrol Inc.

Founded in 1995 by serial entrepreneur Bill Ardrey, TechTrol designs and manufactures electronic controllers, circuit boards and cable assemblies for its own products as well as for a wide variety of customers.



Monitoring bovines

A subsidiary, SmartStock LLC, developed a high-tech health monitoring system for dairy herds, feedlots and cow-calf operators.

TechTrol began in Ardrey's Broken Arrow home in 1995 when he worked primarily as an engineering consultant, designing products for clients. When his customers came to him seeking manufacturing capabilities, he began to look for a manufacturer but couldn't find one that fit the specifications.

"I had a friend who is still here in Pawnee, an optometrist named Dr. Mack Smith," Ardrey recalled on a recent spring morning. "He said, 'Why don't you just come to Pawnee?' I said, 'OK, tell me more.' So the next day, literally the next day, I received a package from the Pawnee mayor."

The rapid response paid off for the community. The city proposed a package in which it would donate land and provide financial assistance to build a 10,000-square-foot manufacturing facility on the northern outskirts of town.

"They needed jobs, and we needed a place to locate," Ardrey said. "So everything just came together."

TechTrol has operated at the Pawnee location since 1998, employing as many as 18, including two full-time engineers plus engineers contracted on a per-job basis.

"We have to fluctuate with the economy, but we've never had to lay anybody off, and I'm happy about that," Ardrey said.

TechTrol also maintains an active intern program for engineering and entrepreneurship students from Oklahoma State University.

In 2001, the company was awarded its first grant from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST), which funded development of a noncontact sensor to monitor chlorine in water supplies.

Today, TechTrol develops its own products as well as providing contract manufacturing for clients such as the military, as well as the energy, equipment fabricating, keyboard manufacturing and many more industries.

In cooperation with OSU, SmartStock received a pair of OCAST grants that supported development and refinement of a cattle bolus device for herd monitoring. Equipped with sensors and wireless communications technology, the bolus is placed in the cattle's stomach, monitors its core temperature and transmits it to a receiver.

Device for newspapers

TechTrol is not Ardrey's first journey into entrepreneurship.

Shortly after he was discharged from the Air Force in the 1970s and completed an engineering degree at University of Kansas, Ardrey created one of the first electronic text editors for the newspaper industry. The technology communicated with teletype machines and fed the information to a computer, where it could be edited and sent on to a typesetter.

"It was a great product, but we ran out of money and had to close down," Ardrey said. "It's humbling when you fail at a business and then get another chance."

Ardrey took that second chance in 1995, and the journey down the entrepreneur's path eventually led him to Pawnee.

"If we employ 10 to 12 people in a town of 2,500, then we touch directly or indirectly 10 percent of the population of this town," he said.

The impact on Pawnee has been "fantastic," said Smith, the optometrist who first suggested the city to Ardrey almost two decades ago.

"I'm so glad I mentioned Pawnee as a possible location to him and delighted that he took me up on it," Smith said. "TechTrol has been a tremendous thing for Pawnee. They have been an awesome employer for the people of Pawnee and the surrounding area."

After nearly 20 years here, TechTrol is building a frontier history of its own.

[See the story in the 4-5-16 Oklahoman](#)

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