



Central State Distributors revitalizes ailing firm

BY TIM STUHLREHER
tims@journalpub.com

Allison Door Sales was on the verge of closing last fall.

The Lancaster County garage door installer had fallen on hard times since the death a few years earlier of its founder, Stanley Allison.

Allison's son, Pete, took over management, but by all accounts service deteriorated. Customers were ordering products but never receiving them. Their repeated calls to the company went unreturned.

By the end, people were leaving sticky notes pleading for service on the door at Allison's business office, to no avail, Dan Boarman said.

Boarman, president of Swatara Township-based commercial and residential garage door installer Central State Distributors, said he was confident he could restore Allison's formerly sterling reputation.

He arranged in November to buy Allison's brand and its customer base of 25,000 clients, and immediately began setting matters right.

Even before the transaction was completed, Central State transferred Allison's phone number to its offices and reached out to its unsatisfied customers, Boarman said.

Those who had paid Allison a deposit for an installation had their contracts honored, he said. Central State installed the doors, provided the customers agreed to pay the remaining



balance, he said.

It took several weeks to clear the backlog of unfilled orders, and one still occasionally crops up, Boarman said. However, almost all calls today are new business, he said.

Central State has a full-time employee dedicated to the Allison service area, with additional employees available as needed, and has outfitted a new truck with the Allison logo.

"We do about 20-plus transactions in Lancaster County a day," Boarman said.

Taking over a faltering business is

tricky, but Central State adopted the right approach, said Bob Cook, a business intermediary with Summit Advisory of Strasburg who consults on acquisition and business succession issues.

Central State's willingness to honor Allison's unfulfilled contracts showed concern for customers' welfare, Cook said. That builds the foundation for positive business relationships going forward, he said.

"They took the high ground," he said. "I commend them. They've done it in the appropriate way."

Central State's installation manager, Karen Remley, worked at Allison for 20 years, rising to the position of administrative manager. Stanley Allison's business had 15 to 20 employees at the time of his death, she said.

"Customer service was his top priority," she said.

However, there were no remaining employees when Central State took over, Boarman said. Remley said Allison laid her off last January.

Ron Martin is a project supervisor with Vanguard Development Group,

a real estate developer based in the outskirts of Lancaster. He said he was pleased when he heard Central State was taking over Allison.

Central State has been Vanguard's garage door installer for several years, while Allison was Martin's installer through 2003, when he ended his 27-year career as an independent residential contractor.

"Service was always great," he said.

Allison's difficulties after its founder's death don't surprise succession planning experts. Only 30 percent of family businesses survive into the second generation and only 12 percent survive into the third, according to the Family Business Institute, a Raleigh, N.C., consulting firm.

Outside advisers can help family business owners maximize their chances of a successful transition to new leadership, inside or outside the family, Cook said.

Their suggestions may include steps such as evaluating leadership capacity, setting up a secondary leadership team and making sure finances and business practices are well documented, he said.

Boarman said he hopes to expand his service in Lancaster, York and Chester counties, Allison's former service area. While technically Allison is no longer a separate company, he has no plans to stop using the name.

"We're going to maintain that name," he said. "It was a very good name for many years." ■

Inside



Head of the class — Meet John J. "Dr. Ski" Sygielski, Harrisburg Area Community College's new president. **Page 3**

Inside Business

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Rising from the ashes — Central Pennsylvania businesses share disaster recovery stories. **Page 17**

Back up and running — Restoration is not a do-it-yourself job, industry experts say. **Page 17**

Behind the list — In this week's Q&A, meet Cliff Ellis, president of Compleat Restorations. **Page 21**

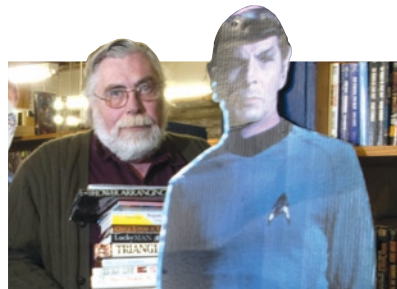
The lists — Restoration companies, **page 25**; Security system companies, **page 26**.



THIS WEEK ONLINE



Join us on Feb. 23 at the Lancaster County Convention Center for the 2011 Nonprofit Innovation Awards. We'll recognize local organizations and executives that demonstrate innovation in their daily operations. For details and tickets, visit www.centralpennbusiness.com/events.



Success stories — Many independent booksellers expand from traditional sales and mix in specialty services. **Page 3**

FEATURES INDEX

Business Record	24
Inside Business	17
Lists & Leads	21
Newsmakers	22
Off The Clock	31
On The Move	24
Opinion	12
The Whiteboard	13

REGION

Distressed properties need capital, know-how

BY ERIC VERONIKIS
ericv@journalpub.com

The small number of investors buying distressed commercial properties in the midstate not only must have sufficient capital but operational know-how to get a bank to back them, a real estate agent and investors said.

Banks are not eager to lend money to just any investor interested in distressed

please see **PROPERTIES**, page 3