

## **Widow sees bright future for Onlight Internet services** **Betty Vollbrecht took reins after Alpha dot Net founder's death in 2003**

Phill Trewyn

As Betty Vollbrecht sees it, taking over as president of Onlight Inc. means carrying on a legacy started by her late husband, Karl, a Milwaukee Internet pioneer.

Vollbrecht left her job as corporate accounting manager for Journal Communications Inc. in April to lead Onlight, a Milwaukee provider of Internet applications including anti-spam, anti-virus and secure connection services.

Onlight has five employees, most of whom worked for Karl Vollbrecht's Alpha dot Net Corp., which was founded in 1992 and became Milwaukee's first Internet service provider, serving more than 1 million users at its peak.

December 1999, Alpha dot Net was acquired by PSINet Inc., Ashburn, Va., an Internet and e-commerce firm that filed for bankruptcy in June 2001.

Karl Vollbrecht died of a heart attack in August 2003. He was 43 and had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis several months before his death.

He started Onlight in 2001 with \$200,000 of personal funding and focused on developing a product called Oasis that ensures non-interrupted Internet connections for businesses.

Betty Vollbrecht, 45, was involved in her husband's business initiatives, mostly handling accounting duties.

Her decision to step to the forefront is based on her relationships with Onlight employees and a belief in the business's potential, she said.

"There's a new energy here," she said of her decision to leave Journal Communications after more than 10 years there. "I wouldn't have made the switch if it weren't for the people working here now. Before joining Onlight full time, Vollbrecht was shaping the company's future.

### **Selling the property**

In December 2003, she sold for an undisclosed amount the 4,000-square-foot building that Alpha dot Net and Onlight had occupied at 757 N. Water St. The property has an assessed value of \$850,000, according to the city of Milwaukee assessor's office. Onlight moved to leased space at 2266 N. Prospect Ave.

"We were kind of encouraging her to come and join the business full time," said Holly Grey, vice president of sales and marketing for Onlight. "She's able to carry on the vision that Karl started,"

Karl Vollbrecht and other Alpha dot Net employees signed a two-year non-compete clause with PSINet after the acquisition.

After the non-compete expired, Vollbrecht launched Onlight, including Grey, and other former Alpha dot Net employees Tim Chase as Onlight's vice president of engineering and Nic Bernstein as vice president of operations.

"We had talked about getting together again and Onlight created that opportunity," Grey said.

Vollbrecht declined to disclose Onlight's annual revenue. Most of the cash flow has gone into development of an updated version of Oasis, she said.

Oasis allows for a seamless transition from one Internet connection to another in the event of service interruptions, Grey said.

### **Providing backup**

Most businesses that rely heavily on Internet access have multiple Internet connections to serve as backups. Oasis provides instant access to another connection during interruptions, she said.

Onlight is targeting financial institutions, health care organizations and Web hosting firms, Grey said. Onlight sold Oasis to four customers at a cost of \$12,000.

Fiduciary Management Inc., a Milwaukee investment firm, has been using Oasis since March, said Chris Grove, the firm's chief information officer.

"The Internet is now so much part of the business landscape that any downtime is unacceptable," Grove said.



Photo: Todd Ponath

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