

ImageTree automates forest mapping

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The old saying "Money doesn't grow on trees" won't apply to a new million-dollar Morgantown business that is revolutionizing the forestry industry.

When ImageTree Corp. opened its corporate headquarters and production facility in an office at the United Center on Van Voorhis Road in March, it harvested top-tier forestry students from WVU's Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences to use specialized aerial photography and seemingly easy but complex computer software to map thousands of acres of forests.

These maps take an incredibly accurate inventory of the type and number of trees in a span of days instead of months. CEO Mark Redlus said the company spent more than \$250,000 on computer hardware and software to give Geographic Information System (GIS) technicians the power to pinpoint a pixilated pine tree in a dense forest.

"Compared to a traditional way of doing things, we offer a reduction in cost, a reduction in time, and an increase in accuracy," Redlus said.

Redlus said the company can inventory 2.5 million acres of forestland, but he expects that number to double by the end of year. There are many businesses, such as paper manufacturers or timber companies, who are willing



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ImageTree Corp. Geographic Information System technicians Dan Servian (left) and Bryan Nash use complex computer software to identify trees on a computer generated map.

to pay top dollar for this information. Forest Systems, a large timber investment and management firm with forests nationwide, is a client.

Redlus expects sales to exceed \$1 million this year. "ImageTree is looking to build on the core foundations of forestry and push those foundations to the next level," he said.

A seedling company started in December, ImageTree now employs 17 full-time workers and 11 paid interns in Morgantown, along with

eight full-time workers at its satellite office in Doylestown, Pa.

Redlus said the company's annual payroll in Morgantown is more than \$600,000. The average salary for full-time workers is \$40,000 to \$45,000 annually. Redlus, 33, who wears a wristband engraved with the word "Imagine" on it, said as sales increase, he would be able to triple the company's workforce to 50 full-time people by 2008.

Redlus gave several reasons why ImageTree chose to locate in Morgantown. He said the reputa-

tion of WVU's forestry department was an immediate draw.

"It was either WVU or Yale," he said. "We liked WVU better. The school is a great fit with a natural pool of talent both in GIS and forestry. Also, locating to Morgantown makes it easier to attract talent because employees can continue to pursue higher degrees in their chosen discipline."

Another reason ImageTree was attracted to the state was the business climate. Redlus credits Gov. Joe Manchin's Open for Business Initiative.

"I'm overwhelmed with the dramatic shift in the business climate of Morgantown, and combining that with the beautiful surroundings, you have a match made in heaven for ImageTree and the people who work here," he said.

Aside from the already stated reasons ImageTree chose to locate in Morgantown, a chance encounter Redlus had more than a decade ago made a deep impression on him.

Redlus, 33, attended WVU for two years before transferring to the nationally renowned Wharton School of Business. After graduating in 1995 with a degree in business management, Redlus created and managed a number of successful companies before taking the helm at ImageTree.

"I really do love the town and the state," he said. "Because of my West Virginia background and my business background, it was a good fit."