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Entrepreneurs of the year

Top prize goes to ZeroChaos' Harold Mills, Nodarse & Associates' Leila Nodarse

Orlando Business Journal - by [Bill Orben](#) Associate Managing Editor

They both experienced tremendous growth in their companies and are poised for even more in the future.

Now, Harold Mills of ZeroChaos and Leila Nodarse of Nodarse & Associates share something else: entrepreneur of the year. Mills was recognized in the category of \$50 million and above and Nodarse for those companies with revenue between \$5 million and \$49 million.

Mills joined ZeroChaos in 2001, bought the company in 2004 and this year was expected to record revenue of \$500 million, an increase of \$150 million from 2006.

Nodarse founded a company in 1992 that earned \$500,000 and last year posted \$20 million in revenue.

Although Mills and Nodarse are in dramatically different businesses -- ZeroChaos is a contract labor acquisition and management company, and Nodarse does environmental consulting, construction materials testing and threshold inspection services -- they share the core value that their successes are grounded in their employees.

Mills, 37, says his executive team is the key to his success. "They make me look good," says Mills, who has a bachelor's degree from Purdue University and master of business administration from Harvard Business School.

Sue Ann Leone, senior vice president of sales at ZeroChaos, says Mills maintains a constant flow of communication. "It's exciting to grow with a company like this."

ZeroChaos has grown because its company's employees do not fear success, says Mills. "I have employees with the courage to engage in a difficult situation and not be deterred until they figure out a solution."

Nodarse has taken her faith in employees one step further -- giving up 10 percent in her company to her top five executives overseeing four markets in the state.

"It's the platform to carry the company to the next stage," Nodarse says of the management structure.



That move was praised by Foard Jones, who chairs the management department at the University of Central Florida College of Business, saying it aligns the interest of Nodarse and her top executives. The structure gives the five individuals a "closer emotional attachment" and shows that Nodarse trusts them enough to give up a part of her company to them.

The organization is critical to the future of the company, Nodarse says, because she wants to grow the company in Florida and beyond to the Southeast. She also has her sights set on breaking into the arena of doing business with federal agencies. Although she does work with transportation agencies and municipal water and sewer providers, she has no federal contracts.

Nodarse and Mills share another passion: giving back to the community.

Mills serves on the African-American Chamber of Commerce and is involved with the Orlando-based Florida Minority Supplier Development Council and the Negro Spiritual Scholarship Foundation.

"Harold is a good teacher and communicator," says Malik Ali, president of the development council, a corporate member organization dedicated to helping minority businesses develop and grow.

Giving back has spread to Mills' employees, who were responsible for logging more than 20,000 hours of community service in 2006.

Nodarse sits on the Valencia Community College Foundation board, Rollins College Board of Overseers, the University of Central Florida Civil and Environmental Engineering Affiliate board, the Florida Hospital Foundation for Children board and the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission board.

Monthly honorees

Here's a brief recap of those named Entrepreneur of the Month during the past 10 months:

January

Company: Coleman Technologies

Top official: Ben Patz, CEO and founder

Description: Computer networking and Internet services

Revenue: \$161 million

Employees: 240

Worth noting: Ben Patz launched his company in 1995 after working on classified projects for the military. Patz, who has extensive knowledge in aerospace engineering, is described as a problem solver who thrives on cracking challenging technical engineering puzzles.

The company's clients include the U.S. government, Cisco, Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics Corp. One of his products, the Flyaway Kit, allows U.S. troops to securely

communicate on the battlefield. What used to require a fully equipped communication team building complicated devices in the heat of battle can now be done by a single soldier with a device that is as easy as plugging in a laptop.

Company employees own a piece of the company, in addition to not having to pay medical insurance, receiving 32 paid vacation days and a 15 percent contribution to a 401(k) and pension plan.

February

Company: Channel Intelligence

Top official: Rob Wight, CEO

Description: Provider of technology to ease online shopping

Revenue: \$10 million

Employees: 110

Worth noting: Rob Wight, who worked on creating Windows 95 while at Microsoft, launched his company in 1999 and calls it "the glue for e-commerce." The company's client list includes Best Buy, Toys R Us, Target, Wal-Mart, Circuit City, HP, Kodak and Microsoft.

One of every four e-commerce purchases uses the company's technology that provides the user with all they will need to know about a particular product, including photos and up-to-the-minute pricing.

Of the tens of thousands of products sold on the Internet, each has 20 to 30 individual attributes and Channel Intelligence can make it accurate every time so the consumer knows what he is buying, says Mark Ebel, director of on-line marketing for Toys R Us.

March

Company: Comprehensive Energy Services

Top official: Todd Morgan, CEO

Description: Mechanical

contracting

Revenue: \$23 million

Employees: 160

Worth noting: Todd Morgan launched his company in 1992 with \$30,000 borrowed from friends and family members and has his sights set on reaching \$50 million by 2010 and \$200 million by 2020.

The company's projects can be anything from a \$500 commercial service account to designing and building the wind effects for Twister ... Ride it Out at Universal Studios Orlando. Morgan describes the company as relationship-based and performance driven.

In addition to a client list that includes Walt Disney World, SeaWorld, Florida Hospital and Westgate Resorts, the company has a fleet of trucks to service commercial accounts statewide.

Morgan and his wife, Shelly, are involved in Cystic Fibrosis and Florida Hospital Foundation fundraising projects.

April

Company: Value Financial Services

Top official: John Thedford, CEO and president

Description: Chain of pawn shops operating in the Southeast

Revenue: \$88 million

Employees: 600

Worth noting: John Thedford started out with three Value Pawn stores in Orlando, Tampa and West Palm Beach in 1994 and now has 63 stores in Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. Although trained as an accountant, he did accounting for one pawn shop chain and learned the operational side of the business from another.

Value Pawn's typical customer is a single mother, Hispanic head of the household who can expect to pay \$23 in fees for a pawn loan. Of the property used as collateral for the loan, 80 percent is returned.

The company is successful because Thedford applies mainstream accounting and business practices to his industry, and the CEO could easily fit in at any Fortune 500 company, says Tucker Byrd, an attorney who represents banks and Wall Street firms at Greenberg Traurig.

Value Financial Services announced in August plans to take the company public.

May

Company: ZeroChaos

Top official: Harold Mills, CEO

Description: Contract labor acquisition and management

Revenue: \$350 million

Employees: 5,000

Worth noting: Harold Mills joined the company in 2001 and purchased it in 2004. It is one of

the country's top minority-owned contract labor acquisition and management companies and recorded a growth rate of 300 percent during the past three years.

The company has secured a spot on the Inc. 500 list of fastest-growing companies. It also made its first appearance in the Orlando Business Journal Golden 100, and also placed on the

Ultimate Fast Five with a growth rate of 109.9 percent, the Ultimate Newcomers and the Ultimate Top 10.

"The combination of his vision, hard work and bold decisions make him an extraordinary entrepreneur," says Tico Perez, Mills' attorney who helped him with legalities involved in the acquisition of ZeroChaos.

June

Company: .decimal

Top official: Richard Sweat, CEO and president

Description: Manufacturer of custom-made brass, aluminum and plastic filters for use in radiation and proton therapy.

Revenue: \$6.5 million

Employees: 48

Worth noting: The company got off to a rocky start in its beginning, with CEO Richard Sweat spending more than a year and a half knocking on doors trying to convince doctors that his product was viable and that insurance companies should pay for it.

The filters that .decimal produces determines the level, and intensity, of radiation given to a cancer patient. For radiation therapy, the filters are milled out of a solid piece of brass or aluminum. The parameters of the filters are based on the results of an MRI administered to a patient. In addition to more accurately determining the dosage of radiation, the filters limit the ill effects of the treatment.

The future of the company looks good, says Sweat, with the long-term outlook of \$100 million in annual sales

July

Company: Leisure Bay Industries

Top official: David Doebler, president

Description: Manufacturer and retailer of spas; retail stores sell patio furniture, billiards, tanning beds and grills

Revenue: \$156 million

Employees: 800

Worth noting: A slowdown in the housing market this year is expected to cause sales at the Lake Mary-based company to dip about \$11 million this year.

Spas manufactured by the company account for half of the sales at the company's 33 stores. The company opened its first store in Florida in the mid-1980s.

David Doebler, who has diabetes, recruits employees, vendors and customers to participate in American Diabetes Association fundraising efforts. Last year, the company raised more than \$260,000.

August

Company: Nodarse & Associates Inc.

Top official: Leila Nodarse, president and CEO

Description: Environmental consulting, geotechnical engineering, construction materials testing and threshold inspection services.

Revenue: \$20 million

Employees: 240

Worth noting: Leila Jammal Nodarse started the company in 1992, earning \$500,000 her first year and this year expects the company to have revenue of \$22 million.

Despite a slowdown in construction, Nodarse believes that intensive marketing efforts in areas like South Florida, where her company holds only a small stake of the market, will earn her more businesses this year.

In April, Nodarse gave up 10 percent of her company to the top five executives who were overseeing the four regions of the state.

When Nodarse got her start in the business more than 25 years ago, she was known as the daughter of Jim Jammal, noted Florida soils and sinkhole specialist. Now, Jammal is known as Leila's dad.

September

Company: Wayne Automatic Fire Sprinklers

Top official: Wayne Gey, CEO

Description: Installation, inspection and monitoring of fire sprinklers and alarms.

Revenue: \$72 million

Employees: 575

Worth noting: Wayne Automatic Fire Sprinklers, which started in Orlando in 1978, has seven offices and expects to record revenue of \$80 million this year.

Although the company has mostly commercial and industrial clients, Wayne Gey believes that the growth part of his business is single-family homes -- which now accounts for less than 1 percent of his business. There is increasing pressure nationwide on

municipalities and other governments to mandate automatic sprinkler systems in new homes to limit the 3,000 deaths nationwide in residential house fires. The change in building codes would add about \$2,250 to the cost of a 1,500 square foot home.

Compensation for workers is based on their performance, particularly how they measure up to an in-depth pay plan. The workers are also shown financial information about the company so they can see how their performance may impact the bottom line.

October

Company: Colorvision International Inc.

Top official: Dick Simmons, president and owner

Description: Keepsake photography and digital video of individuals at theme parks, resorts and attractions.

Revenue: \$18 million

Employees: 531

Worth noting: Colorvision, which got its start in a kiosk in the Altamonte Mall transferring black-and-white images onto a T-shirt, is poised to move on to the next level of photography -- capturing live video of an amusement park thrill ride and inserting it into stock footage for a video keepsake. The video experiment began at SheiKra, a high-speed roller coaster at Bush Gardens Tampa Bay.

The company is in the midst of a transition at the top. Dick Simmons, who founded the company, is turning the company over to his son, Mark, who will become president and CEO. The younger Simmons has been involved in the company since the 1980s when he and his father developed a process that would allow them to transfer color images onto T-shirts.

Although based mostly at theme parks and attractions, Colorvision expanded to Las Vegas in 1994 and business from casinos and shows accounts for \$5 million in sales for the company.

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