

## RSF Technology Eyes Future Following Top-Level Split

**BY BRAD GRAVES**  
*Staff Writer*

**Rancho Santa Fe Technology Inc.** began the year with a new focus - a sharper focus.

It was a return to some core work for company owner, co-founder and president E. Trestand Conrique.

Conrique's company maintains, upgrades and relocates wide area and local area networks - that is, equipment and wiring for computer and telecommunications systems. This builds on an original business of installing voice and data cable.

The San Diego company also provides service on contract. If a client's system conks out, the company can dispatch technicians from Kearny Mesa, Alameda or Phoenix to several Western states, if needed. Response time is a few hours.

In January Conrique's business partner, Cory Crommett, went solo with the company's data center construction arm. That part installs raised floors, seismic bracing, battery back-ups, air conditioning units, and other parts of the computer room "fortress." Such construction brought in roughly \$2.5 million of Rancho Santa Fe's 1999 revenues, which totaled about \$14 million.

"It was a great decision," Conrique said of the spin-off. "Because by driving off the \$2.5 million worth of business, at this point in time, we're on track for next year to do just a tad less than \$19

million. So by losing \$2 million, we've created a focus again back to what (our) core business is."

Conrique noted his company, in its old format, may have been getting segmented. There was also a difference between the partners over goals and philosophies.

"The construction business is very different," Conrique said, noting his partner "wanted to run it more traditionally."

### Maintaining Vision

The decision to split, Conrique said, "let them do that and not compromise our individual visions."

Crommett now does business in Carlsbad as **Rancho Santa Fe Technology MCS** (which stands for mission critical systems). The two agreed Conrique's firm would continue to advertise data center construction, then send work toward Crommett's firm, for two years.

Crommett called the split "extremely amicable" and said it allowed him and Conrique to go in directions they felt important. Crommett said his firm has teamed up with others to build co-location facilities. Also known as "carrier hotels," these house equipment for dot-com and telecommunications businesses.

Crommett's opinion of Conrique? He is a "great guy."

Conrique, 42, who goes by the nickname "Tres," enthusiastically predicted at least \$75 million in annual sales by



Melissa Jacobs

**E. Trestand Conrique, founder and president of Rancho Santa Fe Technology Inc., runs his company with core values dealing with positive interaction between people.**

decade's end. He held up the possibility of breaking the \$100 million mark and possibly reaching \$125 million.

He did not want to be too specific about his own growth plans, declining to give current year revenue projections. He cited a \$19 million goal in 2001 and a \$25 million goal in 2003. The privately held company is coming off a recent setback: Revenues dropped from \$9.5 million in 1997 to \$6.9 million in 1998, according to the *San Diego Business Journal* 2000 Book of Lists.

Conrique acknowledged emerging wireless technology could be part of his future plans. Still, he noted wireless technology relies to some extent on land-based networks. A change in land-based networks is, of course, good news.

"Every time they change, guys like Tres have a lot of work," said Steve Trunkett, San Diego location manager for Anixter International Inc., a Skokie, Ill.-based distributor of cable products. Trunkett characterized Conrique's firm as capable and professional - and one that stays current on technology.

Rancho Santa Fe Technology's mixture of cable work and other network services is atypical in the industry, he said.

"We're going to be in a reinventing mode for a while," Conrique said in the

### Rancho Santa Fe Technology, Inc.

**President:** E. Trestand Conrique

**Founded:** 1991

**Employees:** 114

**Sales:** \$14 million in 1999

**Headquarters:** Kearny Mesa

**Business:** Maintenance, upgrades and relocation of wide area and local area networks; quick-dispatch repair service; design and installation of voice and data cabling systems.

conference room of his Kearny Mesa office – a room he noted was twice the size of his company's original quarters.

### **Humble Beginnings**

The company started in 1991 with \$3,000. By then, Conrique had experience in banking and with two local telecommunications ventures.

An early challenge, he said, was financing growth. So was building a quality work force. "To some degree our concept at the beginning was that we could subcontract the work that we sold," he recalled. "And immediately – I mean immediately, within three months – (we) realized that wasn't going to be possible. We couldn't maintain quality."

So the partners had to rethink that aspect.

As the company has matured, Conrique said he has worked to implement processes in the organization, and keep communication flowing among staff members – even those in far-off places like New Mexico.

Keeping a sense of fun at work while the company changes is a big deal now, he said. "Change is not something that most people absorb real comfortably," Conrique said.

And there is continuous improvement and positioning the company for the future.

"Even if we have to completely reinvent ourselves, I wouldn't suspect that we would become something less than a technology firm," he said.

The company now tends systems for clients as varied as **Cox Communications**, **3Com**, **Peregrine Systems**, **Robert Half International**, **Linsco Private Ledger**, Walt Disney Feature Animation and several prominent banks. Rancho Santa Fe Technology wired the new 80,000-square-foot **Novartis** biotech building on Torrey Pines Mesa and rewired the **San Diego Paradise Point Resort** on Mission Bay. It's now installing the cabling for the San Diego Jewish Academy's K-12 campus in Carmel Valley.

### **Consumer Focus**

Despite its work with routers, servers and miles of telecommunications cable, Conrique is likely to brush off the assertion that technology is at the heart of his business.

It's people, he said.

The company puts an emphasis on customer service. This includes dropping everything to completely listen to a customer's needs and find the best solution. In many cases, computer systems are integral to the client's efforts to stay ahead in business, Conrique said.

The firm boasts of a 100 percent retention rate among Fortune 2000 com-

panies, as well as a 1999 **Arthur Andersen** Best Practices Award for exceeding customer expectations.

Even the company's status as a minority-owned business – Conrique's heritage is Mexican-American – is a nod to customer service. Conrique said early on, prospective customers in the private sector said they could do exclusive business with Rancho Santa Fe Technology if it was a minority business enterprise.

Today, its business stays mostly in the private sector, rather than government, Conrique said.

Tied closely to customer service is employee retention.

"We know that long-term employees serve our customers better than new employees can, and we believe that our employees and our customers build a bond of trust over time," Conrique said. "If an employee leaves, that bond is broken."

The company claims a 99 percent employee retention rate. Part of the retention task is letting employees have fun, Conrique said.

Conrique said he believes in following a set of principles, rather than the profit motive exclusively, to keep his business going.

"If we do things right," he said, "profit will happen."