

Summary Points from *Meet the CEO Series* Meeting held on October 11, 2011

The *Meet the CEO Series* continued with an inspiring visit from Richard Zuschlag, Chairman and CEO of Acadian Ambulance Service. Mr. Zuschlag, originally from Pennsylvania, founded the local ambulance service in Lafayette in 1971. In the beginning, he drove the ambulance. Today, the world-class company has grown to nearly 3,500 employees with a fleet of 255 ambulances, nine helicopters, five airplanes, 20 vans and 107 sub-stations for local operations in Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi.

Zuschlag commented on a number of business topics. Specifically:

- The company was started with \$2,500.00 in capital and the first 25 years of operations were difficult. Zuschlag stated that he and his partners made some mistakes and were not good planners – they were just “do-ers”. In the beginning, they constructed the operating budget as if they were a nonprofit organization. The company has recently become engaged in long term planning using a 30 month (2.5 years) time horizon.
- Acadian encountered problems early on with limited access to enough EMTs and trained paramedics. Zuschlag enlisted the help of former UL President Dr. Ray Authement and the UL College of Nursing to develop an appropriate workforce training program. Today that program is being administered by Acadian Ambulance at community colleges in eight locations around the state of Louisiana.
- Zuschlag spoke of the buy-out talks that took place at Acadian in 1998 when his two other partners wanted to sell their ownership interests in the company. At that time, Acadian created an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) which has become very valuable. As the company has grown, the stock has become more valuable and is currently growing on average at 13% per year. Such a program has returned positive benefits to the company as there are many long term employees working at Acadian Ambulance today. When commenting on the company culture, Zuschlag stated that “people are just happy”.
- Acadian Ambulance has been a key player in recent large scale disasters in Louisiana including Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the BP Oil Spill in 2010. Acadian had just expanded operations into the New Orleans market nine months before Hurricane Katrina and Zuschlag commented on the confusion, poor planning and chaos in New Orleans in the days immediately after the levees broke. He stated that some good has come from the chaos in the form of new rules and regulations, better disaster planning and improved coordination at the state level. During the BP Oil Spill, Acadian assisted with the recovery and clean-up efforts by placing 780 staff members on 14 day shifts at locations throughout the Gulf region. As a result, Acadian is now engaged in more safety work with oil companies and has included this effort as a part of the company’s growth strategy.

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