



Tom Trollinger left behind a career at Wachovia to start his own business.



Contract Office Furnishings has a number of lofty clients.

## Tom Trollinger has become a business and a community man

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Tom Trollinger said he stepped out on faith when he quit his steady job at a top company to start his own office furniture firm. Twenty-five years later, faith is still sustaining Trollinger and his company, Contract Office Furnishings Inc.

"If you sit on it or sit at it, we can sell it to you," Trollinger joked during a special afternoon-long anniversary celebration for his company, which is on 14th Street, off of University Parkway.

The company's 25 full- and part-time employees joined local business and elected officials for the celebration last August. Trollinger has gained a reputation over the years as not only a good businessman but a mentor to up-and-comers and a community supporter.

"He is a hero in the local business community," said Glenn Yoder, who approved a \$50,000 Forsyth Bank loan in the late '70s that enabled Trollinger to start his business.

Yoder is now a business loan officer at BB&T, one of Trollinger's many corporate

clients. Yoder recalls that Trollinger was self-assured about the business he wanted to start.

In addition to BB&T, Contract Office Furnishings has outfitted corporate offices at companies such as Wachovia, Sara Lee,

### Location:

1023 W. 14th Street

### Merchandise:

office furniture

Hours: M-F, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Phone: 724-6911

R.J. Reynolds, BellSouth. The company also has done work for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools and various universities. The company not only serves clients in the city but much of the Southeast.

But the company's client list was not always so exhaustive. In the lean years, the business had only two employees,

Trollinger and his wife, Kay.

"I would go out and sell in the morning and install it in the afternoon," said Trollinger, who left his job as assistant vice president for purchasing at Wachovia to strike out on his own.

"Back during that time, (corporations) were looking for minority suppliers, and there were not a lot of minorities who had products and services to provide to corporate America," Trollinger recalled.

Although he admitted that being a black business owner did help him get his foot into the door at some companies, he said that the service he provided has kept his clients coming again and again.

"Everybody has products," he said. "We have a commitment to customer service. We make sure we do what we say we are going to do, and we make the customer feel we are genuinely interested in providing for them."

Adriane Jones has worked at the company for the last 15 years. She said the work ethic that Trollinger used to found the company has rubbed off on many of the employees.

"He works tirelessly, and it shows because the company has done well," Jones said. "(The employees) are dedicated. It is a lot of team work here. It is a real family environment."

That family environment includes two members of Trollinger's real family: his son, Mike, who is in charge of the company's assembling team (the group that puts together furniture pieces in office buildings), and his daughter, Yolanda, who does a little bit of everything but mostly works in sales.

Trollinger is also keenly aware of the effects that an economic downturn can have. But he said his company will continue to do what it has always done: take it one day and one customer at a time.

"When large companies sneeze, small companies catch pneumonia. We have been fortunate not to catch pneumonia," Trollinger said.

Trollinger also owns the downtown store Workspace Unlimited, where slightly used furniture is offered at a tremendous discount.

## Laptop users can enjoy free Internet service along Fourth

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

People with wireless modem laptop computers or handheld digital devices can access the Internet free of charge along a section of Fourth Street. The Winston-Salem Information Systems Department developed a free public access hotspot late last year that makes it possible for people eating lunch or sitting on benches along Fourth Street to access the Internet.

The Wi-Fi system - which uses a short-range radio antenna to broadcast Internet signals in a focused area - is similar to systems already used at coffee shops and some airports. It is believed that Winston-Salem was the first city in the state with a government-sponsored, pub-

lic access hotspot, and one of the first in the nation use the technology on a large stretch of road.

Fourth Street was chosen because it has become the center of the city's downtown revitalization efforts. Several new restaurants and shops are slated to open along Fourth in the near future. Last summer the city finished a \$2.6 million project that widened sidewalks and added trees and benches to the stretch of Fourth Street that runs through downtown.

"We see this as an economic development tool," said Dennis Newman, the chief information officer for the city. "(The hotspot) will encourage people to come downtown and dine at our sidewalk restaurants and go to our other venues along Fourth Street."



Jeff Smith, the city's unofficial social butterfly, tests the new system.