

Firm provides means to acquire equipment

BEHIND THE TOP 100

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Staff writer

The Rochester Top 100, which annually recognizes the fastest-growing privately held companies in the nine-county region, is sponsored by the Rochester Business Alliance and KPMG.

Here is an interview with William H. Verhelle, CEO of First American Equipment Finance in Perinton.

Please tell us what your company does.

We help large businesses and non-profit organizations obtain the money necessary to acquire the business equipment needed to grow. Larger, sophisticated enterprises sometimes have special needs when they finance new equipment, which might include renting the equipment instead of purchasing it outright. That's what First American does. We rent and finance business equipment to large firms located throughout the U.S.

First American specializes in renting technology equipment (computers, networking equipment, software and related implementation services, for example) to large hospital networks, colleges, universities, law firms, insurance underwriters, and other corporate and non-profit customers located throughout the U.S.

Who are your typical customers? Why would they come to you rather than, say, a bank?

Our hospital clients include some of the largest health care organizations in the U.S. Our college and university clients include Stanford University in Palo Alto, Georgetown University in Washington, Vanderbilt University in Nashville and New York University in Manhattan. Ithaca College and St. John Fisher College are examples of college customers here in upstate New York. Similarly, our law firm, insurance, non-profit and corporate business segments provide technology-leasing services to many of the largest and most recognizable organizations in the world.

Our customers select First American because of two factors. First, we provide a level of service that is not available from the money-center banks and commercial finance companies. Second, our fair and transparent business practices have earned First American trust in the marketplace. Repeat business and customer referrals have been the source of First American's rapid growth.

How has the recession affected your business? We've read that equipment financing is something like a coal miner's canary for economic indicators.

Our industry trade association, the Equipment Leasing and Finance Association in Washington, D.C., indicates that monthly capital-equipment financing volume by its member firms is down approximately 40 percent compared to historical, pre-credit crisis levels. Many finance companies have gone out of business, or are in the process of doing so. Many large banks have closed their equipment finance divisions or scaled them back due to well-publicized capital challenges.

How is the company continuing to thrive in the face of that?

First American has been fortunate to serve some of the most creditworthy institutions in the U.S. The size and stability of our clients has been an important factor in our ability to profitably grow during this financial downturn.

During 2008, First American's total lease and loan portfolio grew by 20 percent. Based on the first three quarters of 2009, we anticipate significant growth again this year. Reduced competition in the marketplace and increasing customer receptivity to diversifying their financing sources are additional factors that have played an important role in our counter-cyclical, successful performance during this difficult time. But that's not the whole story.

Our staff deserves most of the credit for FAEF's continued success. We are very fortunate to employ 80 highly talented, loyal professionals who truly believe in the unique mission of this organization. Day in and day out, these 80 people go about their activities in a manner that inspires the loyalty and trust of both our customers and our business partners.

Your business requires a substantial amount of travel. What do you like to do to unwind when you're home?

My wife, Cyndee, and I have four boys, ages 7 (twins), 5 and 3. As much as possible, I try to spend time with my family when I'm not traveling on business. The kids are all skiers, which is a great winter sport we all enjoy together at Hunt Hollow and Bristol Mountain.

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First American Equipment Finance
No. 24

First American Equipment Finance: Provides financing for companies and institutions to lease business equipment, such as computers.

Year founded: 1994.

Location: 255 Woodcliff Drive, Perinton.

Executives: William H. Verhelle, CEO, of Mendon; Guy Klingler, president, of Newport Beach, Calif.; Michael Ziegelmann, CFO, of Victor.

Employees: 80.

Web: www.fae.com.



William H. Verhelle



Project Managers Nathan Gibbons and Sarah Van Nostrand work on data at First American Equipment Finance in Perinton. The firm helps companies obtain money to acquire business equipment.