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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2005 Vol. 121, No. 279



2nd chance

Padres play the Cardinals in Game 2 of the National League Division



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BUSINESS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2005

NORTH COUNTY TIMES



WORK AND PLAY



TIPS FROM THE TOP

John Ogden, president of Progressive Design Playgrounds, offers these keys to career success:

- Be sure that you're passionate about what you're doing.
- Don't worry about knowing all the answers ahead of time.
- Take risks.
- Recognize your shortcomings, and surround yourself with people who complement you.
- Have a sounding board.

J. KAT WORONOWICZ / FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

John Ogden is president of Progressive Design Playgrounds, based in Oceanside.

'Playgrounds' president is a jack of all trades

ALEXANDRA DeLUCA
FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

OCEANSIDE — While growing up in Virginia, John Ogden had big plans.

"I think I wanted to be a cowboy, astronaut and a pilot," he said. And as a teenager, "I thought I'd make a good lawyer."

Although none of those plans came to fruition, Ogden, 36, has nonetheless worn many hats. He has dabbled in politics, helped build Internet behemoth America Online, tried his hand at wine making and, most recently, become president of Oceanside-based Progressive Design Playgrounds, a company that designs and manufactures

BEHIND THE DESK

President: John Ogden
Company: Progressive Design Playgrounds
Web site: www.pdplay.com

environmentally friendly commercial children's play structures and recreation site furnishings.

At Radford University, it took Ogden a while to settle on a major. He took a variety of social science classes before deciding to major in history.

"I'd always been fascinated by how our government worked, so it seemed like a natural fit," Ogden said.

After college, Ogden went to Washington, D.C., to work for the Senate, working with constituents and on legislative issues.

"It was fun, I really enjoyed it," Ogden said, "but I realized politics wasn't suited for me."

Around that time, a friend told him about a company he was working for called America Online.

"I didn't know anything about it," Ogden admits. Then again, there wasn't much to know: When Ogden joined the company in 1993, it had fewer than 750,000 customers and charged per hour of Internet usage.

At AOL, Ogden assisted with marketing and business development, later signing up e-commerce and selling ad-

vertising when AOL changed its business model to a monthly fee.

"It was a very exciting time," he said. "We were making it up as we went along. It was just a really fun, creative time."

Another plus: Ogden met his wife at AOL.

After moving to San Francisco in 1998, Ogden began to crave a new challenge. At that point, AOL had more than 20 million members, had just bought Netscape, and had several international versions.

In 1999, Ogden left AOL on good terms and went on to join several Internet start-up companies. After the dot-com bubble burst, he took a year off in 2000 to decide what to do with his life. He and his wife traveled the world, and while in Europe, Ogden got the inspiration to start his own winery.

Drawing on childhood memories of living in the south of France, Ogden partnered with Tim Olson to create Olson Ogden Wines in Sonoma Valley. The winery produces a few hundred cases of wine each year, choosing to focus on quality rather than quantity.

"The winery is just getting started — it's not something that can support my partner or myself," Ogden said. "I consider it a hobby."

To make ends meet, Ogden began shopping around for a business to invest in, and in 2004, he acquired Progressive Design Playgrounds from its original owner, Ali Bemanian. Ogden didn't set out to get into the playground business, but found the opportunity was too good to pass up thanks to two unique aspects of the company.

For one, Progressive Design Playgrounds is a licensed contractor.

"Unlike a lot of our competition, we can offer a package deal," Ogden said. "For one price, we manufacture it, deliver it and install it."

Two, the company uses mostly recycled materials in its designs, about 90 percent by weight.

However, the selling point was the playgrounds themselves.

"My favorite thing is knowing that we're putting a product out there that kids are going to enjoy," Ogden said.

Progressive Design Playgrounds has manufactured thousands of playgrounds. Although it originally did most of its business in San Diego County, Ogden said the majority of the orders are now for areas outside of San Diego, a trend that he would like to see continue.

"We're going to concentrate on growing outside of San Diego," Ogden said. "It's healthy for the company to diversify."

Ogden also plans to continue to expand the product line and branch out as other opportunities arise.

"I can certainly see this company getting into ancillary products," he said. "The sky's the limit right now."

For now, Ogden, who lives in San Francisco with his wife and daughter, is happy splitting his time between his two businesses. He commutes to Oceanside about once every two weeks, and is often on the road promoting both of his ventures.

Although he enjoys traveling, Ogden said he would much rather be at home, where he has found his most important jobs to date: husband and father.

"I love spending time with my family," Ogden said. "I have a 2-year-old daughter that just melts my heart."

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