

# SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

This  
WEEK

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## Small Business

### SPOTLIGHT: PROGRESSIVE DESIGN PLAYGROUNDS

■ BY JULIE POUCHER HARBIN

**Progressive Design Playgrounds**, designs and manufactures colorful commercial children's play structures and recreation site furnishings utilizing recycled plastic.

The playgrounds are manufactured in a 16,000-square-foot shop at its Oceanside headquarters. They can also be found at several area housing developments and parks, as well as schools in Cardiff, Carlsbad, Chula Vista, El Cajon, Del Mar, Encinitas, Escondido, Fallbrook, Jamul, Lemon Grove, Descanso, San Diego, San Marcos, and Vista.

The company's chief competitors nationally are GameTime, Miracle Playground Sales, and Landscape Structures Inc., which are among the largest companies in the playground industry.

#### RESUME

**Name:** John Montague Ogden.

**Title:** President.

**Company:** Progressive Design Playgrounds.

**Address:** 2665 Vista Pacific Drive, Oceanside

**Phone:** (760) 597-5990.

**Founded:** 1990.

**Prior experience:** Seven years experience in sales and business development in the Internet industry, including five years with America Online during the company's period of hyper-growth. Before joining AOL, I worked in the public sector as a legislative aide in the U.S. Senate.

**2003 revenue:** \$3.5 million.

**Number of employees:** 15.

**Web site:** www.pdplay.com

#### BACKGROUND

**Born:** March 7, 1969, in Roanoke, Va.

**Education:** Bachelor of Science in history, Radford University, Radford, Va.

**Residence:** Solana Beach and San Francisco.

**Family:** Wife, Margaret Ryan; daughter, Ludmila, 9 months.

#### JUDGMENT CALLS

**Reason for getting into the business:** Disenchanted with the highs and lows of the Internet industry, I spent several years looking for an opportunity where I could apply my sales and marketing expertise to take a stable and profitable company to the next level of success. Progressive Design Playgrounds met this criterion and intrigued me further because, as a new father, I was attracted to the idea of working with products for children that were also environmentally responsible.

**How I plan to grow the business:** The majority of our business is in San Diego and the surrounding areas. I plan to work with my



Melissa Jacobs

John Montague Ogden, president of Progressive Design Playgrounds.

team to duplicate the success we have had in Southern California and expand our reach throughout the country.

**Biggest drawback:** My wife and I are new parents and the dedication required to own and operate a business takes away from family time.

**Biggest business strength:** I'm level-headed in terms of decision-making. I have the ability to adapt in a variety of business scenarios, stay focused on the task at hand and swiftly make decisions.

**Biggest business weakness:** I've had to learn the ins and outs of a new industry in a very short period of time.

**Biggest risk:** Creating environmentally friendly play structures out of a new recycled plastic in an industry that has been dominated by steel and wood for generations.

**Smartest business decision:** So far, it's joining this company a few months ago. A year from now, I'd like to be able to say the smartest business decision I've made was to focus on expansion outside of the greater San Diego area which resulted in a significant increase in profitability and a higher level of national brand awareness for the company.

**Biggest business mistake:** Actually I can think of a few of them and they all end with dot-com! It's nice to be in an industry that is not built on hubris.

**Toughest career decision:** Picking up and leaving my native Virginia for new opportunities on the West Coast. I've since learned when you live in beautiful California and have a guest room, friends and family don't stay so distant.

**Biggest ongoing challenge:** Balancing work and family.

#### DREAMS

**Goals yet to be achieved:** Getting Progressive Design Playground structures installed in all 50 states and in every country in the world.

**My five-year business plan:** Triple business revenues while maintaining profitability.

**I would sell my business only if:** Selling the company is not something I can even speculate about at this time.

#### PHILOSOPHY

**Guiding principles:** Treat others how you would like to be treated. Foster partnerships where all parties will benefit. Never say or do anything you would not want to see on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper. My wife, a seasoned publicist, instilled this last virtue in me.

**Most admired entrepreneur:** Ted Leonsis, owner of the Washington Capitals and senior executive of Time Warner. I had the pleasure of working for Ted after he sold his marketing communications firm to AOL in 1994.

**The most important part of my business:** Maintaining ongoing communication with my team of employees, ensuring that we all stay on track and share the same vision, even as we experience growth.

**Important lessons learned:** It is possible to make a living doing something you enjoy.

**Advice for those looking to go into business:** There is no such thing as "punching out." But along with the risk, time commitment and responsibility, there are rewards.