

## So what is all this **LEGACY** stuff about, anyway?

Over the past year and a half, VIP Club newsletters have had articles about the early history of our various businesses, and reports from the legacy committee. Although this activity has been going on and is supported by the VIP Club leadership, many people are unaware of just what is happening, why it is happening, and of the opportunity for everyone to participate. This summary should provide some clarification.

**Background:** In late 2005, Lockheed Martin Corporate, motivated by the realization that their current company was created from over 20 predecessors, asked the various operating units to “capture their legacy” without a real concept of what was to follow. In Eagan, Ole (Dick) Olson was tasked to respond; he formed an ad hoc group of volunteers and contacted the VIP Club Board.

The group quickly realized that the history of Engineering Research Associates (ERA), continuing to the present, was a remarkable story of technological innovation and contribution to the computer industry in general and to Minnesota in particular. ***This story, particularly the early years, has never really been completely told; e. g. ATHENA launching missiles.*** To be sure, there are accounts written from the business history perspective, from various customer and user perspectives, and partial documentation in many places. However, we are unaware of any account, which properly gives credit to the ingenuity, vision, and hard work of ERA and its successor company employees, and their contributions to Minnesota and the world.



The legacy committee feels that it would be a terrible loss not to capture the full history, thus inspiring our efforts to determine just what can be accomplished. There is a bit of urgency, as the memories and materials relating to the ERA beginnings are disappearing rapidly. Our pioneers are dying, successor corporations are shredding records, and memories are fading.

**Objectives:** The committee has defined three priority objectives. First, we need to **capture** whatever remaining material and information we can. To date, this had been in the form of career and program summaries contributed by long-time employees, oral histories from past company leaders and technologists, and reviewing and saving Lockheed Martin files before they are forwarded for destruction. There have also been donations of various documents and artifacts (hardware components, models, displays, photos, marketing brochures, and memorabilia) from various individuals.

The second objective is to **catalog and archive** all the material collected. Cataloging is necessary to make a record of the material to support our third objective (keep reading), but for the long term we need to get all this material to a place that will provide safe, durable storage and future public and scholarly access. The archival strategy is evolving, but almost certainly will involve the U of M’s Charles Babbage Institute and the Minnesota Historical Society.

The third objective is to **publish/publicize** our history and heritage in a way that interests others within our industry and our fellow Minnesotans. The committee is considering three

forms/formats. We may be able to put up some sort of an 'innovations' **display at the Minnesota Sesquicentennial** exhibit on May 17 and 18, 2008. This would be a relatively broad (and hopefully high in "wow" factor) introduction to the ERA legacy, and would be an excellent way to gauge the general interest in the ERA story. Secondly, we envision a **book** that thoroughly documents the whole ERA story. Finally, from (or in parallel with) the book, we would like to see a PBS-style **documentary** that would popularize the story for a wider audience.



Some of the early findings are on the web – Check out the information on Lowell Benson's site: <http://www.usfamily.net/web/labenson/Legacy.htm>, which will be moving to the VIP Club site <http://vipclubmn.org> over the next two months.

**Opportunities:** The activities to date have been the efforts of a relatively small group, but to really be successful, we will need much broader support. Every current and former employee of a company that traces its roots back to ERA (including companies which sprang from or supported ERA and its successors) has a potential contribution of material, information, or support. Discovering sources of material, collecting and archiving it, and organizing it in a form for public consumption will be a long term enterprise and will need virtually every type of skill and effort we all employed in our work lives. The VIP Club is the greatest repository in the world of these resources and we are inviting all of you to join in and help where you can.

Almost by accident, the initial activity occurred on the Lockheed Eagan side, but we all recognize that the Twin Cities Unisys folks have an equal stake in this story, and we need to make sure that their contributions and history are preserved and documented as well. There is a spot to use everyone's skills – just a few ideas of where folks can help:

**Contributions** – We would like everyone to provide a career summary, any historic material you may wish to contribute, and to urge your fellow retirees to do the same.

**Collecting and cataloging** – We need to ferret out material in a bunch of creative ways, identify it and its significance, then prepare it for archiving and for our own publication and use. Every source we have looked at to date reinforces the realization that this involves a lot of work, and every source seems to point to a new pathway for discovering more information.

**Publication and Publicization** – We need information organizers, people who can help write up the source material (we intend to get professional help for the final product), and ultimately we will probably need to raise (not collect) some money to finance the effort. If we are to participate in the Sesquicentennial, **we need your help starting NOW!**

If you are interested in joining in this engaging effort, please contact one of the following:

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