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The call of the wild lured man to start company

by Tom McGee
 Staff Writer
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When nature calls, Bill Powers of Murrysville always answers ... by picking up the phone.

It's not unusual for Powers, the owner and president of PixController Inc., to pick up his phone to discover pictures of deer, turkeys, foxes and even black bears that have been sent from an unmanned camera in the woods.

For Powers, these calls of the wild are research.

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Photo by Lillian DeDomenic

PixController sells motion-activated cameras that take pictures or record video. Marketed to hunters and wildlife groups, the devices are intended to document the animals that visit a specific territory.

Rhino video & photo link

For information on how PixController equipment was used to photograph the Sumatran rhinoceros, [click here](#). For more wildlife video, visit [PixController.com](#).

The company started as a hobby. An avid hunter, Powers said he had an interest in knowing what sort of wildlife lived in the area.

"I just wanted to find out what's out in the woods," Powers said.

So he began tinkering.

Powers began developing his cameras at night in 1999 while working at an engineering firm. Two years later, he had the first design, a digital camera in a camouflage box that could take a picture when a motion-sensor was activated.

The early version of the camera was designed to be put together by hunters so they could film their property to see different types of deer. Soon, Powers began to market a prepackaged version for anyone to use.

Penn's Woods, a hunting company with locations in Delmont and Export, commissioned Powers to make their Digital Scout line of cameras.

"Obviously, these (animals) are out there 24/7," said Greg Newman, co-owner of Penn's Woods. "You'll see things you can't find."

While the company was beginning to take off, it was about to become a full-time job for Powers. The engineering company he worked for called the business a conflict of interest and gave him the choice of resigning or being fired, he said.

"It was a blessing in disguise," Powers said. "It gave me the chance to establish the business."

Once he and his wife, Donna, were able to fully dedicate themselves to the business, it began to take off.

The line has expanded to include digital video recording devices to capture footage of the critically endangered Sumatran rhinoceros species in Borneo and Tasmanian devils in Australia. The rhinoceros footage gained international attention because it was the first time the breed, the smallest rhino species in the world, was caught on camera.

Powers said the company sells about 4,000 cameras a year.

The cameras have enabled people to see what happens when animals don't know they're being watched.

"All this action happens between 2 and 3 a.m. and no one's there to see it," Powers said.

Whenever his personal cameras capture something on his property, he can be notified immediately. The cameras have been programmed to send an image back to a cell phone or laptop. A more advanced design can send a video feed to a monitor.

The Westmoreland Conservancy and the Murrysville parks and recreation commission have used the cameras on their properties. The conservancy has had more luck photographing wildlife because animals have learned that more people use the parks and subsequently avoid public land, Powers said.

Betsy Aiken, head of the Murrysville parks and recreation commission, said the photographs offered a glimpse into what happens at night when the parks are closed.

"They gave a real understanding into what animals roam through," Aiken said.

Powers plans to begin marketing the cameras to contractors to deter theft and vandalism of work sites.

The company recently received a contract to install cameras along the Appalachian Trail to catch all-terrain vehicle riders who have been destroying the land.

Powers also plans to release a book to show how the devices can be used and how to capture the best footage.

"You have to know where to set up the cameras and where to look," Powers said.

That knowledge can help a wildlife enthusiast discover things in their own backyard.

"It's like Christmas, you never know if you're going to get something no one has seen before."

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