

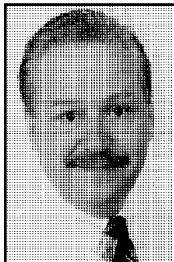
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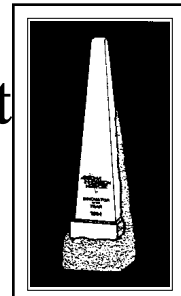
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Arizona Innovation Network



Here is the AIN award winner for 1994

SenSei enables disabled to run equipment



Lon Safko, president and CEO of Tempe based Safko International, Inc., was totally surprised to hear that he was named 1994 Innovator of the Year, sponsored by the Arizona Innovative Network.

Safko designed a computer hardware and software product called SenSei, a Japanese term that refers to the highest dignity. The idea behind the name is to enhance the dignity and self-esteem of people with disabilities.

Up to 256 electrical appliances can be connected to one unit, allowing a disabled person to control everything from entertainment systems to electric hospital beds. A quadriplegic can blow into a puff stick, or tube, and actually turn on a television or even send a fax.

Safko invented the system in 1985 because he tried to save a man's life - a man who broke his neck and became quadriplegic after trying to help a quadriplegic friend down some stairs. The man lost his job, his entire savings, his home and his marriage.

Safko heard that the man was in the hospital and refused to eat or take medication because he no longer had a reason to live. The man later told Safko that if he could have moved his hands he would have killed himself.

"I told him don't die, I'll build you something," Safko says. "I developed the world's first voice-activated computer for the disabled."

After helping the man, Safko decided he wanted to help other disabled people. What he didn't know was that along the way he would be named 1994 Innovator of the Year. "I didn't know who submitted me, I didn't know I was even being considered," Safko says.

Liz Mattheisen-Jones, senior account supervisor at the Martz Agency, quietly submitted Safko's innovative software product that helps people with disabilities gain independence.

At the time Martz submitted the nomination, Safko was interviewing that public relations agency, among the others.

"I was impressed," Safko says. "They took it upon themselves, even though they had no contractual obligation. She's that type of person, that's why we chose her."

Mattheisen-Jones says she didn't nominate Safko to help secure the PR contract. "WE were just so

impressed with what he was doing. The potential impact of what he has developed is so tremendous and seeing and actually meeting the people who already have this equipment in place in just a fantastic thin," she says. "Once in a while you hit upon these people who have done wonderful things"

The system also allows a disabled person to access nearly 15,000 computer programs written for Apple Computer, and also allows the user to make phone calls, send facsimiles, read books or have books read to the user.

After six years of research and development, Safko is just beginning to market the system, which costs an average of \$15,000. He is in the process of completing a private offering for a little more than \$1 million.

Safko says he expects to sell 250 systems during the first year, which would bring \$3.75 million in revenues. I told shareholders I

hope to show some kind of profit, and I think we can," Safko says, knowing that most startup businesses don't make a profit for the first three years of operation.

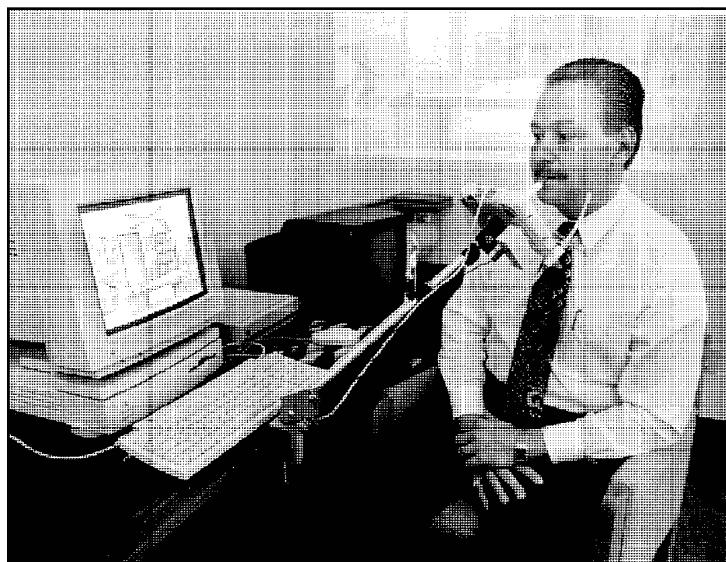
It's a two-edged sword. We want to keep prices low enough to help the disabled population, but we always have the fiduciary responsibility to our shareholders," Safko says. "I think if we keep that balance, I think we can actually satisfy both" Of the estimated 259 million people living in the United States, about 48.9 million are disabled citizens, which means they have mental, physical, visual or hearing disabilities. About 3 million of them are severely disabled.

Our market was a quality-of-life issue for 3 million severely disabled people who can't turn on their own lights or change a TV channel, or even those qualified to go to work but who can't use a

computer or telephone," Safko says.

During Safko's R&D stage, the company sold about 30 systems to hospitals and disabled people who were testing the product. Many did not want to give the product back when testing was completed, Safko says.

In the Phoenix area, the system is in use at Bar-



Lon Safko President of Safko International, Inc. shows how the SenSei System works for people who are without the use of legs and arms. It won Computer / Software Product of the Year Award.

row Neurological Institute at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center, Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center, Synergos Rehabilitation and Valley of the Sun School. It also is being used at New York University, Palo Alto (Calif.) Veterans Administration Hospital and various school systems across the country.

Safko recently agreed to install 25 units as a test site for the new Sonoran Sky School in Scottsdale.

Now that Safko is beginning to market the product, the company has more than doubled in size within the past three months. It employs 11 full-time people, three part-time workers and six consultants. By the end of March 1995, Safko expects to have 20 to 25 full-time employees.

"We're expanding fast," Safko says. "By the first of the year, we will need 6,000 square feet."