



Raymond E. Shirk, president and CEO of The Securus Group Inc.

While many businesses have grown timid during the economic slowdown, Ray Shirk has avoided the temptation to pull back and wait for better times. "There are two types of business people. One sits back and waits, and a lot of them aren't around any more.

"I try to be aggressive in an intelligent way. You can't live in fear. We are aggressive. We have 14 salespeople on the street. We have our own advertising department. We control the whole process." And that business is aimed at helping its customers through services such as insurance, employee benefits, wealth management, and bonding.

As president and CEO, Ray oversees everything at The Securus Group in Lancaster, and he has a clear vision of what makes the company

successful. "Number one is to hire good people and to create an environment where they can work and be successful. Two years ago, we were voted #9 among the Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania." The top company that year was Nxtbook Media, which also has its offices on the same site as Securus.

Securus operates on the third floor of a beautifully renovated brick building at Urban Place, 454 New Holland Avenue. Ray owns the building, which was originally part of Armstrong, later Kerr Glass, and a variety of clients including the Science Factory occupy the first two floors.

Ray grew up in Juniata County and graduated from Penn State in 1972. Even then he had such a keen business sense that while he was in Happy Valley, he never saw Franco Harris, Lydell Mitchell, and Jack Ham play. Instead, he saw game days as earning opportunities. "I worked

EXECUTIVE SUITE

Human Development

Ray Shirk: Securus

By Bill Simpson

during games. Employers would pay time and a half. I never saw a game until after I graduated."

As he was nearing graduation day, he received job offers from W.T. Grant and Procter & Gamble, but he didn't find either of those especially appealing. Then he received a challenging job request from Kemper Insurance. Kemper asked him to take over its least productive area, which extended from Schuylkill County to Chester County. For \$8,000 a year, Ray signed on and quickly brought life to the moribund territory.

In 4 years, he turned Kemper's lowest producing region into its most productive region. During those years he learned a lot about the insurance industry and a very important lesson about business: In that situation, other people were making a lot of money through his hard work. So in 1976 he joined CCAB Insurance in Lancaster and stayed there until he started Securus in 1992. Securus, by the way, is Latin for "to insure". Ray chose that name because the name Shirk Insurance just didn't inspire him.

Ray started The Securus Group as an eight-employee insurance agency in 1992. Today, Securus has 61 employees, and it includes Securus Financial Services LLC and The Securus A&C LLC, which acts as third-party administrators. In addition, The Human Focus deals with human resource issues, and Securus Bonding provides surety bonds. In 2009, Securus expanded with the acquisition of The Dunlop Agency in Berks County.

And even as the nation's economy has scuffled over the last 2 years, Securus has stayed steady. "We're doing okay. We're making a little profit. The end of 2009 was a bit bumpy; 2010 is going well. We've had to adjust to the conditions."

Although no one likes lean economic periods, Ray does see a value in them. "It's good to have some times like these. We've learned efficiencies, and we've had no staff reductions. We have hired over the last year, and we may hire some more people this year. Service is all that we offer, and we must maintain it. We want to see each client at least once a month, and that's just a minimum."

When he does take a break from his busy schedule, Ray likes to head to the golf course and spend time with his family. He's a member of the Lancaster Country Club, and he loves the whole golfing experience. "I have a group that I play with. I love to be away from work."

Ray also enjoys watching golf, and he had nothing good to say about Tiger Woods after The Masters. In his post-tournament interview, Woods essentially said that he had lost the tournament, and he gave no credit to Phil Mickelson for winning. "Woods was rude in the interview. Phil was so gracious. Nike should teach Woods to be nice."

For Ray, family means wife Lisa, sons Ben, Eric, and Adam, and four grandchildren. Lisa also works at Securus as CEO executive assistant, and she participates in a variety of community activities. "She's chairwoman of the Heart Walk. I run the company. We split the duties that way."

Eric and Adam manage Shirk & Sons, a commercial real estate firm in Lancaster. Ben lives in Gunnison, Colorado, where he once earned recognition as one of the top 100 ski instructors in the U.S.A. He also owns a fencing company that often builds long expanses for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) across the wide-open spaces in the West. "On one job, they put up 400 miles of fence."

They have four grandchildren, with three of them here and one in Colorado. One place where the family likes to gather is their getaway home in Juniata County. It's near Seven Stars, which is just up the road from Dimmsville, which means that it's a quiet place where black bears and deer regularly stroll through the property.

Ray and Lisa go to church at LCBC near Mount Joy. LCBC is much bigger than most other churches. "We had between 9,000 and 10,000 people for Easter services." At the church, they belong to a life group of 12, which offers a more intimate worship experience.

Ray works a lot of hours, and he thoroughly enjoys all of them. "It's fun to come to work. I love to grow and develop people."

