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THE KEY PLAYERS + EVENTS SHAPING THE PUGET SOUND BUSINESS SCENE

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(INNOVATIONS)

All is Not Lost

Data Recovery Room may be your last best hope to save those crucial files.

By Michael Hood

YOU TURN on your computer as you have hundreds of times, but instead of the familiar digitized landscape of your carefully groomed desktop, there's the infamous "blue screen of death" or the dreaded "flashing question mark."

In cases like this, you'll probably hear the words you always feared would one day be uttered by your information technology person: "I'm afraid you've lost your data."

So whom do you call? In Seattle, it very well may be an obscure mom-and-pop operation that offers data recovery expertise to some of the state's most prestigious companies.

Tukwila-based Data Recovery Room, a business that has specialized in saving data since 2000, is operated with little fanfare by data recovery specialist David Julian and his wife, Beverly. The couple runs one of the few "clean

From this modest office in Tukwila, David Julian has saved the necks of countless clients by retrieving data that others considered "lost."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE HIPPLE

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rooms" in the state that is used to retrieve information for businesses and the general public. Their list of clients includes Boeing's ultra-secret Phantom Works operation, Microsoft's research department and the University of Washington.

Boeing and Microsoft do have their own data-retrieval operations, but the two companies have turned to Julian for help with serious data recovery issues that need immediate attention. "They come to us when they can't wait and go through the usual channels," he says.

Experts maintain that about 70 percent of Americans who use computers fail to back up their important files. That negligence keeps the Data Recovery Room buzzing.

In fact, Julian says that hard-drive failure happens more frequently than most computer users realize and is not the result of viruses or internet spam. Instead, he says, the twin enemies to a computer's hard drive are heat and dirt. "What we see mostly these days is physical damage, drive failure or deletions," he notes.

Not all is the information kept on a faulty hard drive is recoverable, Julian cautions. Some discs are too damaged physically to reconstruct. He and his wife can recover material that has been deleted but not if it's been written over.

DRR's services are expensive. Single-drive systems are evaluated for \$200, but recovery can range from \$700 to \$7,000. Multiple-drive systems, as used in larger operations, can run from \$2,000 to \$20,000.

The clean-room operation is costly because of the special filtration systems required to keep the air particle-free. Technicians at DRR must

"The biggest cause of drive failures is use," Julian says. "It's rarely viruses anymore—the protective software people are downloading is working."

also don outfits that resemble spacesuits. With the high degree of miniaturization in today's computer technology, much of the work must be done with microscopic tools.

"Hardware is getting smaller, yet the file capacities are growing exponentially," Julian says. "We're now dealing with files with 2 or 3 terabytes. Even the summaries of such files are too big for regular computers to handle."

The company sees more large files because of the increasing number of digital photos and videos being stored. "Family photos are priceless to people," he explains. ☺

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