

Collaborative effort

*The Copenhavers have built an EMR business on a little seed money—
and a lot of family talent*

BY NEIL VERSEL

Electronic medical records vendor JMJ Technologies clearly has some big plans—and a big family.

It's been like that ever since the Marietta, Ga., company started in a basement in 1994, says co-founder John Copenhaver, M.D.

"Myself, (brother) Mark and my other brother, Jim, wanted to form a company and we kind of didn't know what to do, so we just thought about it for quite some time," John Copenhaver says. "We knew it wanted to involve computers."

The germ of their idea was already present, though.

Atlanta's Grady Memorial Hospital had installed an EMR system just as John was finishing his residency there through Emory University.

"It was essentially an all-typing, keyboard entry system, and it was very cumbersome and very difficult to use," he recalls. "My first thought when I saw it was, 'There's no way this is going to work

anywhere outside of a university system.' Something was wrong, in that it took about eight times as long as writing it out."

But, he says he realized, "One day electronic medical records would be a norm, would be a standard for patient charts simply because of the abysmal state of physician handwriting and the transfer of information."

Mark already was a software developer. Jim—James B. Copenhaver—was and still is a full-time pilot for Delta Air Lines but was able to help his brothers choose the proper hardware.

They had their idea. They had their personnel. All they needed was some seed money.

"I called up my mother-in-law and said, 'We want to start a company. We need 10,000 bucks,'" John says. "She thought about it and said, 'Well, OK.'"

"She was a rather brave woman," according to John, for taking a chance on

an unproven product and "on an unproven family."

So the Copenhavers used \$10,000 of borrowed money to start JMJ—and promptly brought more relatives into the business.

The founders' father, Air Force Col. James D. Copenhaver, was preparing to retire from the military shortly after his sons established JMJ. He retired in December 1994 and came on full-time as CEO. His wife, Carolyn Copenhaver, joined the firm in 1996 when her boys needed some marketing brochures.

"I was a teacher," she says. "So I had some experience in cobbling words together. I produced the collateral materials for the company. And it just grew from there."

Jim and Carolyn's daughter, Kathleen, met Kane St. John when she was in seventh grade and eventually married him. Both earned law degrees and settled in Dallas. In 1996, they moved back to the Atlanta area.

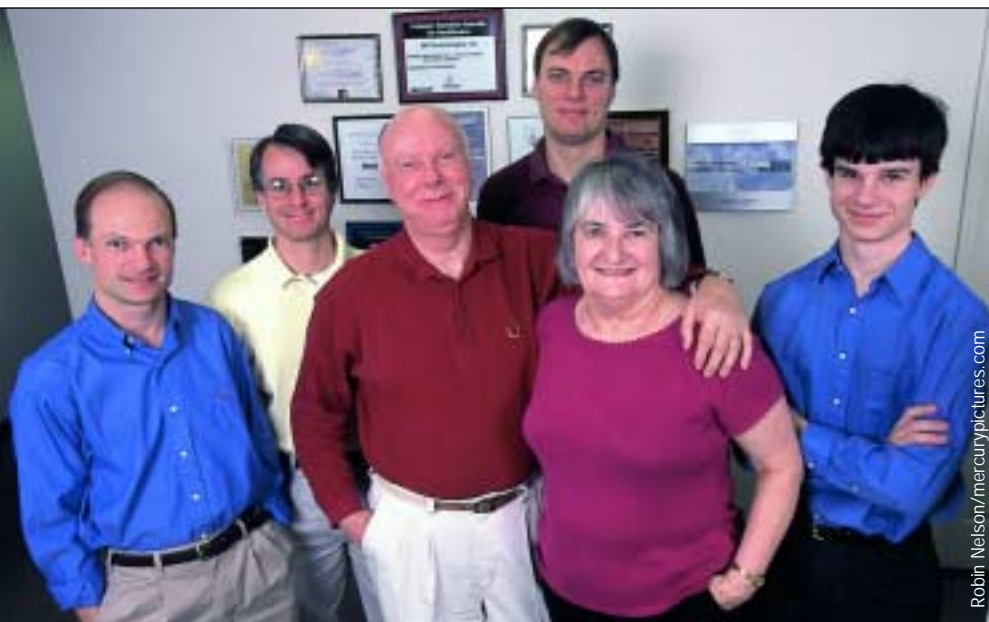
"They needed help here at the firm, so I came down one morning and drafted a contract," Kane St. John says. "Then I came down the next morning and pretty soon I was hooked." He is currently JMJ's COO and general counsel.

Kathleen St. John came on board in 1998 as a database developer and configuration guru.

The St. Johns' son, Christopher, who turns 20 this month, started helping out around the office when he was 13. At 16, he earned Microsoft certification as a Visual Basic programmer and eventually became a full-time employee.

"He would spend his summers with (grandparents) Jim and Carolyn, and since they were going down to JMJ, he would go with them and sort of look over Mark's shoulder," Kane St. John says.

Christopher says he has grown to love the job. "I like working for my family. It makes work more like having fun. Of course, it makes being at home more like being at work."



Robin Nelson/mercurypictures.com

The Copenhaver collaboration includes, from left, John Copenhaver, M.D., Kane St. John, James D. Copenhaver, Mark Copenhaver, Carolyn Copenhaver and Christopher St. John.

ENTREPRENEURS

John Copenhaver, a pediatrician who left his practice to work at JMJ for several years, returned to medicine last November with an independent, 132-physician private practice that staffs emergency rooms in four area hospitals.

He now devotes about 80% of his time to the practice and the remainder to his role as JMJ's vice president for clinical applications.

"I'm a clinician at heart," he says.

AMBULATORY NICHE

When the company first started, John worked as a pediatric emergency physician at Egleston Children's Hospital in Atlanta, but his ambitions were focused on creating a workable EMR. "We certainly didn't see anything out there at the time that we felt the doctors would use."

"Everyone else who had an EMR only was marketing and placing it in hospitals," says Mark.

"What really gave me a big boost in my thinking and in my design was several universities had published a lot of research on the idea of a medical record and they had actually focused on the ambulatory setting.

"The research was there—that's really all that was there. There was nothing in the form of a product."

At that point, John's medical knowledge came into play. "I told Mark how the patient moves through the office, what happens at each station, who's involved, and Mark turned that into a database design," John says.

"We knew that keyboard typing would be out," he says. "We also felt that dictation needed to be gotten rid of because of the cost. So we needed to design a user interface that was absolute minimal keyboard entry and no dictation, if possible. It naturally progressed into using touch-screen or some type of stylus."

The application, which JMJ named EncounterPRO, relies on touch screens and other single-step input methods for physician data entry.

The Copenhaver brothers chose Jeff Cooper, M.D., whom John had met during his residency, as the guinea pig.

According to Carolyn, "When John was showing him the system, he got a phone call and had to leave the room.

"The computer was unattended and Jeff decided to chart a patient with pneu-

monia. With John gone and by himself, he charted the patient in about two minutes. He said that was his 'Aha!' moment. He said that's what convinced him."

JMJ installed its first beta system in Cooper's practice in November 1995.

Cooper says he now has more than 8,000 active patients in his solo practice—and just one physician assistant, one full-time nurse practitioner and one part-time NP.

The EMR, he says, "has allowed us to serve a lot more people in a manner that gives us good, quality healthcare."

Once it had Cooper's vote of confidence, the fledgling company gained its first customers by word of mouth, then found others by presenting its wares at trade shows.

Lately, sales leads have been coming off JMJ's Web site, a change Mark attributes to greater physician understanding of EMRs.

"It used to be really glassy eyes, not really comprehending what they're looking at, and now the lights go on very quickly," he says.

The product was built for small practices of one to 20 physicians and can be customized for various medical specialties, but the company now hopes to target larger, multispecialty practices with its new version 4.0 of EncounterPRO.

Jim says, "I see great strides forward this year, for several reasons. Our product—but also the market, I think—is getting better in general. I think it's going to be a fairly good year for most companies that can offer and show the customer some kind of return on investment."

Cooper says he believes in the Copenhavers. "They've put their heart and soul into this company. They just had the right combination of talents."

Staff morale is high, too. "We have an atmosphere where people enjoy working here. . . We laugh and we joke, but we get the job done," Jim says.

"I have to say that this is an environment that really tries to maximize everybody's talents," Carolyn says. "We have people here migrating to higher and more responsible jobs all the time."

"I look forward to coming to work every day. I can't wait to see the family and the friends and the workers. We're a very close family. It's really been fun," she adds. ●

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