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UPDATE

QUALITY ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS INC.

Location: 1611 S. Franklin Road
Phone: 351-4255
E-mail: dpeters@qepi.com
Web site: www.qepi.com
Founded: January 1996
Founder/owner: Deb Peters
Service/product: environmental,
engineering and redevelopment services
Employees: 32
Revenue (past 12 months): \$5 million
Date of first profile: October 1997

The cowboy days are over.

Or at least they have ended at Quality Environmental Professionals Inc., owner Deb Peters said.

When Peters, 49, started the environmental consulting firm 11 years ago, she and her top managers were geologists, not businesspeople. Referring to herself and her colleagues as "cowboys," she said the business grew faster than they expected.

Characterized as an 80-hour-a-week workaholic in *IBJ's* 1997 profile, Peters said she had to spend that much time in the office when her top managers didn't pick up the slack.

Then a performance coach persuaded her to make changes. In late 2003 and early 2004, Peters fired three directors, and two others left QEPI soon after. She filled some of the positions with high-performing junior-level staffers.

"I had my heart in it too much," Peters said. "That was one of the hardest things I ever had to do."

But it worked. For the past four years, annual revenue has steadily hovered around \$5 million as Peters set up a solid business plan and properly trained new employees with a range of backgrounds—not just geology. Now, with almost \$14 million in a project backlog, she expects to have a "huge year for growth" while spending a more reasonable 50 to 55 hours a week in the office.

A number of projects will fuel that growth, Peters hopes.

As a woman-owned business, QEPI became part of a federally funded Small Business Administration business-development program that helps companies get federal contracts.

The firm also provides engineering services for American International Group, and has a contract with the city of Evansville to plan some brownfield redevelopment.

By the end of the year, Peters expects to have 40 employees, \$6 million in revenue and a new office in Dayton, Ohio. Now, QEPI has an office in South Bend and shares space with another firm in Illinois and Tennessee. The five-year plan calls for a staff of 150, \$17 million in revenue and offices in 12 states.

Peters is confident her employees can get the job done.

"I'm as calm as I've ever been," she said. "I'm going to take some real vacations this year."•

—Lisa Gerstner