



Lisa Watring, left, David Ciabaugh of Woodland Machinery in Decatur, center, and Dale Watring check the progress of a crystal-growth furnace under construction at Watring Technologies.

## Company of 2 finds success by taking heat for customers

*Firm furnishes furnaces to produce industrial crystals*

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Dale Watring sat down with the firm's scientists and engineers, trying to convince them that his and his wife's company of two was the best for the job. The project: building a 10-foot-long, 12-foot-wide furnace to process advanced materials for the aerospace industry.

At one point, a research scientist asked pointedly, "Why do you think you can do this?"

Watring pulled out a portfolio full of glossy photographs of Watring Technologies' previous projects.

The Watrings got the contract.

In fact, lining up jobs isn't the main hurdle these days for the couple's home-based business.

Instead, it's keeping up with the workload.

"We've been involved in building or modifying hardware for about every com-

## Doing Business in the Tennessee Valley

### Lisa Watring

**President:** President, co-founder, Watring Technologies Inc.

**Born:** June 7, 1964

**Education:** Received bachelor's degree in elementary education from Athens State College and an associate's degree in general education from Calhoun Community College.

**Experience:** Administrative/clinical employee at Lockheed Space Operations Co. at Kennedy Space Center in Florida from 1987 to 1989; administrative/clinical support employee in the professional staffing and college recruitment departments at Intergraph Corp. in Huntsville from 1989 to 1990. Founded Watring Technologies Inc. with her husband, Dale Watring, in 1997.



**Community involvement:** Member of Church Council, Small Group Visioning Team, Emmaus Community and Susanna Wesley Circle and an assistant with children's chorus, coordinator of Summer Adventure program at Trinity United Methodist Church; adoption advocate with Lifeline Children's Services in Birmingham; an organizer of the Children of Chernobyl USA Huntsville program in 1999 and 2000, hosting Belarusian children effected by the radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

**Family:** Husband, Dale Watring; Claudia Watring, 5, and Seth Watring, 3.

**Advice to budding entrepreneurs:** "Follow your dream. If you believe in what you're doing, go out on a limb and do it."

### And her company

**Address:** 102 Cheval Blvd., Brownsboro

**2000 sales:** About \$500,000

**Biggest problems:** Keeping up with the workload with only two people in the company

**Solution:** Have strategic alliances with four other companies, work with five machine shops for projects

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## Couple's firm designs and builds furnaces for high-tech crystals

### Company

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mercial crystal growth process there is," said Dale Watring, the vice president and chief scientist of Watring Technologies, which designs, builds and installs furnaces to produce highly pure crystals for the semiconductor and optical industries and consulting work as well. "We've got jobs that will cover us for 12 to 18 months out."

"We average turning out a furnace every six months," said Lisa Watring, the company's president. "It's not uncommon for us to be building two furnaces at once."

The couple rely on strategic alliances with four other companies and as many machine shops, including Woodland Machinery in Decatur, where a furnace is being built now.

It's been a whirlwind for the couple since it started a technical consulting company as a sole proprietorship in 1997. Their two children were almost 2 years old and about four months old at the time.

"It was a natural for us to go into business together," said Dale Watring, who lived next door to Lisa Watring growing up in tiny Leadmine, W. Va. "I married the girl next door."

The couple started the company out of their home, at the dining room table, using the equipment they had on hand and keeping a tight budget.

"I was apprehensive in the beginning," Lisa Watring said,

"but I think we're so busy, we don't have time to drive each other crazy. I've only fired him once," she added with a laugh.

Watring Technologies' first major project was for Ebara Solar Inc. near Pittsburgh. "The company (Ebara) went out on a limb with us," said Dale Watring. "We were the new kids in town so to speak."

"We were having trouble sustaining crystal growth" to produce a ribbon form of silicon, said Dr. Daniel Meier, the company's chief scientist. "We didn't have a cost effective way to produce silicon wafers used to make solar cells."

The Watrings took Ebara's concept of using a magnetic field to improve the crystal-growth process and designed, built and installed a magnetic system to attach to a furnace.

"Their technology is what got us on the path," said Meier. "It made a major difference. We've been able to get to sustainable crystal growth that shows we can be a player in the solar cell market."

The Watrings decided to in-

corporate their business in August 1998 as they started delivering hundreds of thousands of dollars in hardware to customers. Dale Watring left his job as chief technologist with the Science Directorate at Marshall Space Flight Center last November after 14 years with NASA. He'd been putting in "another eight- to 10-hour day" with Watring Technologies' work after his full-time job at NASA.

"I woke up one morning and said, 'There's only 24 hours in a day,'" and he needed more time to handle both jobs. "I decided that day to type up my resignation."

The Watrings like being a company of two even though it's not unusual for them to be working until 1 or 2 in the morning.

"People ask, 'Why only two people?'" Lisa Watring said. "I say, 'Why not?' We're producing high-quality products and services and we're satisfying customers."

The Watrings expect sales to double this year, projecting

sales of about \$1 million for 2000.

"But we're about three-quarters of the way there, already," Dale Watring said. "We're building a lot of prototypes and, if we get multiple orders of the same prototypes, we'll definitely break the \$1 million mark."

They do expect to start hiring in another six months, though.

"We're probably at the point where we should be considering bringing in one or two full-time folks," he said. "But we'll be quickly overwhelmed again. We try to let the business force us to grow. We don't like overhead if we don't have the work in place."