

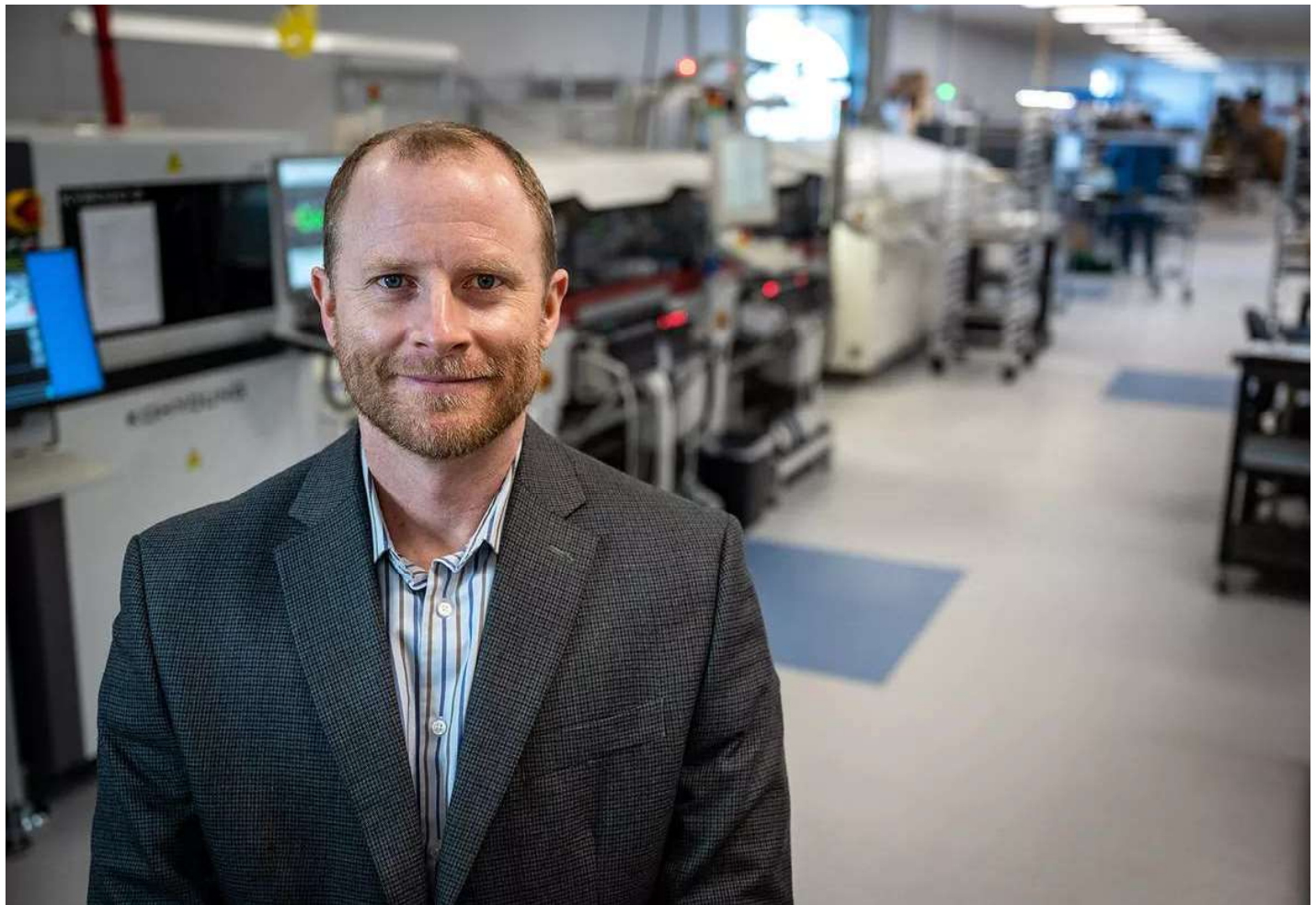
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Front & Center: Tate Technology president Scott Tate building electronics to power everyday life

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Scott Tate, president and owner of Tate Technology, joined the family company in 2007 as a sales engineer. He became president in 2014. (COLIN MULVANY/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW)

			
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By Amy Edelen 
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As president and owner of Tate Technology Inc., Scott Tate is building electronics found in crosswalk control buttons, cellphone towers, drones and surgical robots.

The Spokane-based company, founded in 1992 by Scott's father, Lee, is a contract electronics manufacturer for military, agriculture, transportation, communication, industrial, medical and aerospace industries.

Tate joined the company in 2007 as a sales engineer and assumed the role of president and owner in 2014 following his father's retirement.

Since then, Tate has led the company – which has 45 employees – through a relocation in 2019 from a facility it occupied for more than 25 years on Trent Avenue to a larger, 18,000-square-foot building at 5716 E. Sprague Ave.

The relocation was prompted by a notice in 2018 from the Washington state Department of Transportation informing the company it was acquiring the property it occupied at the time via eminent domain to make way for the proposed North Spokane Corridor.

Nearly six months after relocating to the new facility, Tate was faced with navigating the company – which had been experiencing significant growth – through the coronavirus pandemic.

The company did everything it could to stay open while ensuring the safety of employees, he said.

“It was a terrible roller coaster, but we fared as well as it could be considering the circumstances,” Tate said. “We were able to keep the doors open and the lights on and we recovered. By the end of July, things started picking back up, and we became more accustomed to the new normal. The orders started happening again. It was a blip in terms of revenue compared to previous years, but it was not as bad as it could have been and we were very fortunate.”

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As a mechanical engineer, Tate has been involved in product design for Keurig, Delta faucets, kitchen cabinets and diamond drill bits, among other things.

Tate, who was born in Salt Lake City and raised in Spokane, graduated with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Utah in 1999.

As a college student, Tate obtained an internship at Parametric Technology Corp., a Boston-based computer software and services company that had an office in Salt Lake City.

The company developed mechanical computer aided design software. As part of Tate's internship, he trained and assisted customers with using the software.

"Fortunately, I did that because it was 1999, right at the start of the dot-com bubble being burst," Tate said. "Had I taken even just a year longer and graduated in 2000, there were no jobs to be had in engineering at the time. So I was able to intern and get a full-time job working for them."

Following his employment at Parametric Technology Corp., Tate designed drill bits for Provo, Utah-based Novatech before relocating to Boston in 2002 to work for Proteus, a consulting firm that did product design and marketing.

Tate recalls one of his first projects at the firm was for Keurig, which had been making commercial coffeemakers.

"It was a very unique project. It was very accelerated. They needed a prototype in a matter of weeks, which was an extreme challenge," he said. "At the time, it was kind of this odd product that everyone was even wondering would it even sell. And fast forward just a few short years later, almost every home in America seems to have a Keurig machine in it. So, it's pretty fun to look back and think that I had a small role in it during its infancy."

After spending a few years in Boston, Tate and his wife, Jona, moved back to Utah in 2004 to raise their family outside of the hustle and bustle of a large East Coast city, Tate said.

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Tate said selling products was initially intimidating, but he quickly grew to enjoy the job, as it provided an opportunity to provide solutions to customers.

“I quickly realized that we weren’t just peddling products, we were offering solutions and researching with the factories and the customers as to what the best solutions would be,” he said. “I was working with people and solving problems, and I loved it.”

The ‘people factor’

About 2005, Tate Technology had recovered from the dot-com bubble burst, which had heavily impacted the company because, at that time, its only customer was in the telecommunications industry.

Lee Tate, who had led the company’s rebound by diversifying its customer base, and decided it was time to retire.

“He approached my sister because she had worked in electronics manufacturing, and she’s older, so she was the clear choice to see if she’d be interested in taking over,” Tate said. “She ended up passing on it because she was living in Boise and she wanted to make sure that she had a job that allowed her to focus on her children. After much deliberation, my wife and I decided that it was an opportunity that we really couldn’t pass up.”

Tate accepted a position at the company as a sales engineer and moved to Spokane in 2007. Tate said he initially didn’t have any intention of taking over Tate Technology, but his engineering and sales experience made him a perfect fit for the role.

“Really, the pieces of the puzzle fell into place,” Tate said. “At the time, it seemed, ‘Well, maybe we’ll consider it,’ but looking back on it, it made perfect sense for both my dad and for myself.”

Tate’s father remained owner and president of Tate Technology until Scott paid off a loan for a majority share of the company in 2014.

The junior Tate attributes the company’s growth to hard work, loyal employees, ethical

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within the company, your customers and your vendors ... really, the biggest thing I enjoy is that ‘people factor’ to positively affect others,” he said. “It’s absolutely a key motivator in my life. Whether that’s helping a neighbor with a broken faucet, or ensuring that our customers’ products are shipped on time and with great quality, it’s all the same.”

Growth mode

Communication is key to leading a successful business. It’s also important to be fair, kind, dependable, honest and consistent, Tate said.

“Your team needs to know which direction the ship is heading and its destination. Without this knowledge, the team is on a rudderless ship without knowing where they are going or why. It is impossible to motivate people to follow if they do not have a clear path,” he said.

Tate said it’s imperative for businesses to “always be in growth mode.”

“If you aren’t, if you get complacent, then someone else is going to take that market share from you, or your customers are going to see that you’re complacent and either your service goes down, the quality goes down or your on-time delivery ratings go down,” he said. “So by staying hungry and always being in a growth mode, then it means you’re always looking for what’s next.”

Tate said he’s looking forward to the ability to meet with customers again when the pandemic ends. He’s also planning to acquire some new equipment to meet the demands of more customer orders and grow the company.

“We’re in the process of reviewing that now so that we can say ‘yes’ more often to either existing customers or new customer opportunities,” he said. “That’s really the goal.”

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