

# MICHAEL JAMES

## Fireproof Records Center

**F**ireproof Records Center used to be all about storing and protecting your *paper*. Now it's all about storing and protecting your *information*, no matter whether that info arrives as ink on dead trees or as bits and bytes on e-media. And it's Fireproof CEO Michael James who's been driving the transition since 1987.

Founded in 1906, Fireproof is Central Ohio's oldest and largest independently owned commercial records center. Michael's father, Edward James, bought what was primarily a moving and storage business in 1970. Fireproof entered the document-storage business in the late 1980s, and Michael James progressed from selling shredding services to managing operations to marketing Fireproof's disaster-recovery services.

Today, in addition to maintaining 500,000 square feet of document warehousing at four Central Ohio locations, the company also stores close to a terabyte—for those not into geekspeak, that's 1 *trillion* bytes—of electronic information.

Marilyn Tomasi, a veteran Columbus marketing and PR manager, credits James for making Fireproof an information storage leader. "He is very smart, incredibly entrepreneurial and extraordinarily tough-minded," Tomasi says. She also says Fireproof under James's command "has given a lot to the community philanthropically."

James deflects such praise. "We have hired good people," he

says. "We try to give our people the opportunity to dream a little about how we can be of better service to customers. I listen to employees as much as I listen to customers." Many key personnel have been with the company 10 years or more, says James, and most employees on the 60-person staff have been on board at least five years.

James, 40, attributes much of Fireproof's sales growth—15 percent to 18 percent a year recently—to the company's aggressive efforts to diversify and add new sources of revenue. During the past decade, James has added a document imaging service bureau—one-fourth of Fireproof's business is now devoted to imaging—electronic document delivery services, electronic records management and distribution of imaging software products.

Fireproof also maintains a "business continuity center" that gives subscribers who've been forced from their own offices by a fire or other disaster access to temporary office space, telecommunications and data services.

Helping companies become paperless is Fireproof's biggest mission, James says. Still, offsite storage of paper documents remains the company's core business, with more than 1.5 million boxes of paper stored at the company's four locations. Fireproof currently keeps offsite records for more than 1,700 clients, including every hospital in Central Ohio.

*"Helping companies become paperless"*

