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Mark Holt Biography

As a boy, Mark Holt raised horses with his dad and brother and worked at a nearby dairy farm to earn spending money. Little did he know at the time he would one day be president and CEO of Vi-COR®, a multi-million-dollar enterprise engaged in the manufacture of yeast-based products in Mason City, Iowa. When his family moved from their acreage in Postville, Iowa to Clear Lake, Iowa in 1968, Mark took on paper routes for the local Globe Gazette and the Des Moines Register. “I had a two-mile-long paper route to earn money for boarding my four horses,” says Holt. The following year, at the age of 14, he sold his horses. At the age of 15, he bought a motorcycle with the profits. During high school, he continued to develop his work ethic through the trapping and selling of pelts.

In 1972, while Holt was a junior in high school, his father bought Ferment-a-Feeds (now Vi-COR) in Mason City, Iowa. “I grew up in the business,” he says. “I swept floors in the warehouse at night. My brother would pick me up after school and bring me to the plant. He bagged and I swept.” He also maintained his side job of trapping. When Holt graduated from high school in 1974 at the age of 18, he bought a jeep with his earnings, loaded it with supplies and his white German shepherd, Shiloh, and headed off to the Black Hills of South Dakota. “I built a teepee and lived in it for a month,” he says.

When Holt returned to Iowa, he took classes in microbiology at the local college and went to work at another family business, a sporting goods store. He stayed there until 1976, when he decided to strike out on his own and went to work for Amway for one year. “I got a great sales education,” says Holt. “I learned to figure out what I want, write it down, carry it with me and refer to it a lot.” He also had a business epiphany. For the first time, Holt examined what motivates people to buy. “I learned, when it’s about them, people are more likely to buy. So I started looking at the customer’s needs from the customer’s point of view.”

In 1996, following the deaths of his parents in 1994 and 1995, Holt made a trip to Thailand to visit customers of the family business, which had been renamed International Whey Technics, Ltd. During this visit,

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Holt realized the enormous growth opportunities available to his father's business. That's when he set goals for himself. "I was going to acquire the company, install equipment, launch new products, and hit \$5 million in sales in five years and \$10 million in 10 years," remembers Holt.

By December 2008, he had met or exceeded all of those goals. What goal does he now have written down? "To be a leader in the industry for providing natural solutions to animal health, performance and nutrition," says Holt.

Mark has a number of hobbies, including hunting, fishing, boating and flying planes. Mark obtained his pilot's license in 1993. The desire to fly planes was born out of the need to travel extensively throughout the Midwest troubleshooting silage bunker failures for his former employer. The ability to land at small regional airports and even land in alfalfa fields at some farms made it easy to conduct business in a timely manner. Today Mark's passion for flying is benefiting Vi-COR by moving people efficiently around North America. Mark says being a pilot enables him to cover a lot of territory in one day—fly to St Louis for a morning meeting, head for Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a lunch meeting, over to Madison, Wisc., for an afternoon meeting, then arrive home in time for an evening dinner with his family. Vi-COR presently operates a single engine turboprop aircraft capable of carrying five people plus Mark (the pilot) to 28,000 feet, which has the ability to be above most of the weather. Mark currently holds a multiengine, commercial, instrument rating and maintains currency by participating in an annual pilot proficiency program.

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