

# Houses From the Heart

## Rickers Offer Time, Commitment to Community

In the corporate lexicon most of the words currently in vogue are the “me” words: consolidation, commercialization, capitalization and the like.

The words you might not hear so often in the context of corporate culture are the “we” words: concern, compassion and caring.

Those words represent guiding principles for a Madison County company that prides itself on its ability to make money while making itself an integral part of its community.

### Small business, big dream

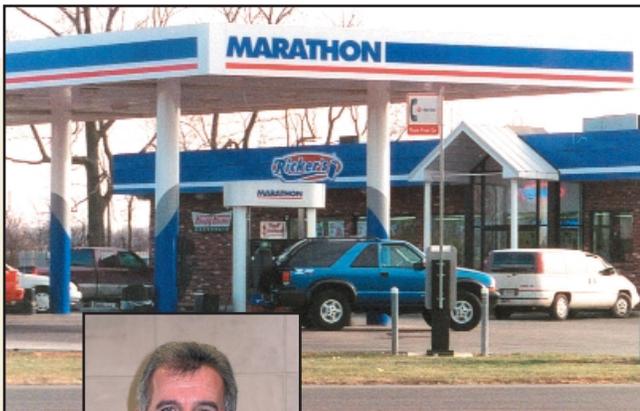
Jay Ricker and his wife Nancy started Ricker Oil Company in 1979. He drove the tank wagon and she kept the business’ books out of their Middletown home. In the ensuing years, the Rickers bought four more oil businesses in Anderson and relocated their headquarters there.

The company changed direction in 1990 as the Rickers got out of the oil delivery business and into the highly competitive world of operating convenience stores. They currently own 20 stores in Madison County communities and with a partner purchased another nine stores in Fort Wayne. In fact, if you’re thinking of buying a soda or pop in a community with a Ricker’s store, be prepared.

“We started a fountain drink program,” recalls company president and founder Jay Ricker.

“We sold any size for one price, a very reasonable price. Our 20 stores down here do what an average chain of 400 stores does in sales of fountain drinks. We do literally millions of dollars of fountain drink sales, so much so that though we offer a full line of Coke™ and Pepsi™ products. People in this particular market don’t say they want a Coke™ or a Pepsi™; they say they want a Rickers. It evolved into a pop being called a Rickers here. We didn’t do that. Our customers did that.”

Ricker’s operates 20 convenience stores in Madison County.



### Charity begins at home

A healthy portion of the profits taken in from selling all that “Ricker Pop” and the accompanying gas goes directly back into the communities that are homes to Ricker’s stores. The company’s primary philanthropic project is Habitat for Humanity, which is a not-for-profit Christian housing ministry that builds and renovates decent, affordable housing for people who might never otherwise have the opportunity to own a home.

“We did our first Habitat house in 1995,” Ricker says. “We decided we wanted to be the major contributor or build a house each year from then on, eventually in every community where we have a store. That very first house we actually built with our employees and our vendors, and we paid for the majority of it.

“But we’re just not a large enough organization to do all the building on our own, so since then we have been the major contributor to a house each year. That comes out of our corporate funds, but we also solicit our customers. We always come up with a few extra thousands dollars that way and it all goes straight to Habitat. We’ve participated in seven houses and just gave the money for the eighth house.”

Several Ricker Oil Company employees still volunteer on Habitat for Humanity building projects.

“We’re kind of lined up in the community’s mind with Habitat so much so that I actually get fairly frequent calls from people wanting to know how they can give or get involved,” Ricker continues. “I’ve also had people catch me at our stores and say ‘I really want to thank you for doing that ... I buy my products from you because you give to Habitat and I feel so strongly about it.’ “

Ricker Oil Company donates an average of \$20,000 each year for the Habitat house. The

By Laura Adams



**Habitat for Humanity homes ... in progress and completed.**

company also made a major donation to the renovation of the historic Paramount Theatre in Anderson and is in the process of setting up a trust within the Anderson Community Foundation that it hopes to add to over the years.

“As we have become more involved in the community there are always more demands for money,” Ricker explains. “We have focused on children too in our business and while it’s not a big one, it’s a whole bunch of little ones. We pretty much sponsor Little League teams all over the county and we also like to do post-proms.”

Gloria Collins is the executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Madison County. She has high praise for the commitment of the Rickers as a couple and a company.

“They’re very low key. They don’t make a big deal out of it. That’s not why they’re in it,” Collins comments. “One of the things I think is so wonderful about them is not just the financial commitment they make, but that they get so personally involved. They attend the community awareness services; they attend the dedications. It’s not like they just write a check and that’s it. It’s their personal involvement. They’re simply a great example to other businesspeople.”

### Service with a smile

Nancy Ricker has just begun serving a two-year term as the president of Habitat for Humanity of Madison County. She is also actively involved as a director of the local symphony. Jay Ricker just completed his term as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce for Anderson and Madison County and is a newly elected member of the board of directors of the Indiana Chamber.

“They are very dynamic individuals, very well respected in their community,” says Keith Pitcher, president of the local chamber. “Jay was a particularly active board chair here. I hate to see him go. Some of the key issues we focused on included forging better working relationships with city and county

government and cleaning up downtown. Jay does a tremendous amount of traveling, but he’s always available when we need him. He’s just very dynamic and organized, and he has strong leadership skills.”

Ricker lends those leadership skills to the board of Anderson’s Community Hospital, the community foundation and the Corporation for Economic Development in Anderson. He is tirelessly active in trade organizations and sits on the international board of directors of the National Association of Convenience Stores.

### Time flies

The Rickers possess the common complaints most of us have: too many demands, too little time.

Jay Ricker readily acknowledges that running a business is time consuming but says, “I really think you’ve got to be involved in your community and the service organizations, the philanthropic organizations, to really participate in your community. So many times people take from the community but they really don’t give back like they should.

“Many people do, but a lot don’t because it’s such a hectic life. You’re raising children, making sure your business is profitable. You only have so much time. I would urge people that they need to choose what they want to get involved in. Focus on that and I think you can do it.”

Ricker’s philosophy of being an exemplary corporate citizen is two-fold:

“Number one, you need to participate in your community.

The second part of the philosophy is that you need to give directly back in some sort of substantial form. A lot of people say ‘Well, I just don’t want to take the time,’ but if you do it right it does take time and that’s your investment. It’s not so much the money part; it’s the time.

“It seems that so many of the large national chains running business or manufacturing don’t participate in the communities they’re in,” Ricker adds.

“So now you no longer have the hardware store and the sporting goods store and the owners of those participating in the

Rotary and the Lions Club. The pool has gotten small, so when you’ve got a smaller pool like that I really think it makes it even more important for people to step up. I know it sounds corny, but quite honestly I’ve always gotten back more than I’ve given.”

**Anderson’s historic Paramount Theatre.**



### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Ricker Oil Company at (765) 643-3016 or [www.rickers.net](http://www.rickers.net)

Habitat for Humanity of Madison County at (765) 649-4260.