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RedPrairie CEO says resignation isn't tied to disputed invasion

By RICK ROMELL
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Businessman John Jazwiec resigned Friday as CEO of RedPrairie Corp., saying he will return to the Chicago area.

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Jazwiec, who has been in the middle of a controversy over his report of a home invasion that some have questioned, said in an interview he wasn't forced to leave the software development firm.

John Jazwiec

"This had been in the works for quite some time," he said. "My parents are getting up there in age. Matter of fact, my father broke his hip two weeks ago, and I've been with the company six years, which for me is a long time."

The resignation closely follows an unusual series of events that began four weeks ago when, according

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to Jazwicz's account, he and his family were held hostage and robbed in their million-dollar east side home by a man armed with a sawed-off shotgun.

The story touched off fear in Jazwicz's well-to-do neighborhood near Lake Park, but also raised red flags. Chief among them was that Jazwicz didn't call police.

Instead, the outspoken executive - who previously had generated heat with blunt criticisms of Milwaukee and Wisconsin as places to run a growing technology business - called the office of Mayor Tom Barrett the next day to complain about crime. Jazwicz also had an assistant call a reporter to set up an interview.

Police and - more pointedly - Ald. Michael D'Amato have raised questions about Jazwicz's account. D'Amato called the businessman's story "spurious" and said he had "unnecessarily besmirched the reputation of one of Milwaukee's finest and safest neighborhoods."

It wasn't until a week after the incident at Jazwicz's home that he said he wanted police to investigate, and that happened only when a detective called him as he was leaving town on a business trip.

Then, when he returned from the trip, Jazwicz told police through an attorney that he no longer wanted to pursue the investigation. A police spokeswoman, however, said the department would continue to investigate the matter.

Shook up business


Jazwicz said Friday that controversy over the home invasion report had nothing to do with his resignation.


"No," he said. "I mean, it was a traumatic event for my family, and we dealt with it and we felt that the right thing to do, emotionally, for the family was to drop the case, and from my point of view, the matter's closed."

Jazwicz, 48, doesn't have a new job.





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"I want to think about what I want to do when I grow up," he said. "I've been in the venture world. . . and I'm going to take some time to decide whether I want to start a brand new company or do kind of similar work to what I did at RedPrairie."

Jazwiec, who grew up in Elgin, Ill., said he plans to leave Milwaukee before the end of the year.

"We're going down to Chicago to make an offer on a home" today, he said.

At RedPrairie, Jazwiec brought in a buzz-saw style that ripped through the company, a developer of warehouse-management and other software.

"He's got no mute," a former colleague said in an interview last fall. "Basically, he is a brilliant guy with no mute. . . . What he thinks, he tells you."

Underneath that, though, was what former colleagues describe as sharp business sense that helped strengthen the company financially.

Hired in January 2002, Jazwiec shook up what then was called McHugh Software International - sacking managers, instituting a hard-nosed corporate culture and leading an acquisition drive.

Out went the McHugh Software name; in came RedPrairie, with its techy sound suggesting an on-fire Midwestern kin to California's Silicon Valley.

Jazwiec shed the title of chief executive officer and became company results leader. Employees became customer advocates.

He set up a stereo in his office, put on hard rock and turned it up so loud that the walls literally shook, a former executive said.

To Jazwiec, that was one more way to transform the firm's attitude and, by his account, the approach worked. The company has gone from financial losses to a projected \$52 million profit this year, he said. Annual revenue, about \$40 million when Jazwiec took over, has grown to about \$250 million, thanks in large part to a series of acquisitions.

Jazwiec's "no mute" style got a public airing last year, when he blasted Milwaukee as a parochial, crime-ridden city in a high-tax "welfare state" - neither of them, Jazwiec said, attractive to the sort of executives and tech workers a company such as RedPrairie needed.

He hinted strongly that the firm and the 200 jobs at its Town of Brookfield headquarters would be leaving Wisconsin.

Jazwiec's critique resonated with some and drew retorts from others, including those who suspected he was trying to extract government aid by threatening to move. He denied that.

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Downtown on the list

In any event, a downtown Milwaukee parcel has been on RedPrairie's list of sites for possible new headquarters. That possibility is still in play, a source familiar with the matter said Friday.

At the same time, a RedPrairie board member said the firm's current headquarters is near the homes of many employees and has been "working very well for the company thus far."

"There are no plans for an imminent change," said board member David R. Golob, who also is a managing director of Francisco Partners, the San Francisco-based private equity firm that has owned RedPrairie since 2005.

RedPrairie also announced Friday that Jazwiec will be succeeded by R. Michael Mayoras, who has been the company's president for the Americas.

Tom Daykin of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report.

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