



Richard G. Engel,

President and CEO of Powerplant Specialists Inc.

When Richard G. Engel, 42, launched Powerplant Specialists Inc. (PSI) in 1981 to maintain and refurbish major electrical generative stations worldwide, he thought he could slip by unnoticed. The big boys in the field (e.g., Bechtel and Fluor) were too busy racking up million-dollar engineering contracts around the globe to take notice of Engel's efforts.

In 1986, however, the Costa Mesa-based company surprised the competition by doubling its previous year's performance, turning in sales of \$12.4 million in fiscal 1986. Moreover, with a boost from overseas contracts, the company is set for a repeat performance in fiscal 1987, Engel says.

Meanwhile, Fluor and Bechtel are suddenly sitting up and taking notice of the upstart in their midst. In 1986, Engel notes, he found himself competing for bids against the giants. But, in a true David-and-Goliath saga, Engel's PSI has won many of those contests. For instance, modification work on a natural gas-fired electrical generating station in Oxnard was completed for \$7.9 million—against competing bids as high as \$11 million. Impressed by Engel's dollar-crunching bids, PSI's customers today include Southern California Edison, Martin-Marietta & Texaco.



Edward M. Esber Jr.,

Chairman and CEO of Ashton-Tate

Edward Esber Jr., the 34-year-old executive at software publishing giant Ashton-Tate, has the look of an Old Testament biblical scholar. In fact, he is a Harvard-trained MBA with the calm, methodical approach of a pragmatist. His pragmatism may be unexciting, but it has certainly produced results. Fiscal 1986 (which ended January 31, 1986) saw Esber reporting a 122-percent increase in net income (\$16.6 million) to his satisfied shareholders. At the same time, revenues leaped 48 percent to an all-time high of \$121.6 million.

Things are not slowing for fiscal 1987, either: the Torrance-based software company reported first nine months' earnings at a record \$19.5 million, an 84-percent increase over the same period for 1986. Moreover, revenues advanced 85 percent to \$147.9 million from \$80 million.

Apart from the strong balance sheet performance, Esber has molded Ashton-Tate from a one-product software producer to a multiproduct force. As of 1986 the company held 40 percent of the market for personal computer database management programs.

A one-time skydiver, Esber has also made acquisitions a part of his game plan: In 1986 he acquired Decision Resources of Westport, Conn.



Safi Qureshey,

President of AST Research Inc.

Safi Qureshey is probably sick of hearing his company described as an American success story. All three founders of this Irvine-based manufacturer of a personal computer and enhancement products are immigrants. Qureshey, a 35-year-old engineer, hails from Pakistan. But the truly remarkable thing about Qureshey and the company he co-founded and heads as president, is that while others in the industry are bailing out, AST has become the darling of Wall Street. 1986 profits were \$27.1 million on sales of \$172.3 million, a 43-percent improvement over fiscal 1985. Even in the slump years between 1982 and 1985, when many electronics companies rolled belly up, AST showed radiant health with profits in 1985 galloping to \$19 million from previous year totals of just \$5 million.

To what does Qureshey attribute AST's success? Partly the continuing strength of IBM. Despite encroachment from Apple Computer and overseas competitors, Big Blue continues to dominate the personal computer and business applications market. AST embarked upon an aggressive campaign in 1986 to manufacture and market a family of high-performance personal computers and desktop publishing systems of its own design.



Carmelo J. Santoro,

Chairman and CEO of Silicon Systems

Carmelo Santoro is a survivor. With determination and tenacity, the 45-year-old top executive at Tustin-based Silicon Systems, a specialist semiconductor manufacturer, has led his company from red to black. Struggling out of 1982 losses of \$1.5 million on \$16 million in revenues, Silicon Systems has turned in a fiscal 1986 balance sheet showing revenues of \$66.8 million, up 22 percent over the previous year.

Santoro comes from a modest Italian-American heritage. He has the feisty, blunt-spoken ways to go with the image. Santoro specializes in corporate plain-speak: regular rap sessions with employees are part of this chairman's monthly agenda.

But, like so many in the industry, Santoro's company is not without its downside. In the first quarter of 1986, for example, Silicon Systems reported a disheartening \$2.4-million loss on revenues of \$11.3 million.

Nevertheless, Santoro believes he is on the comeback trail. He increased sales volume by 23 percent over the previous year. Finally, as part of his stated intention to find new market niches and build volume on them, he introduced 30 new products in 1986.