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Company helps 9/11 probe after losing one of its own

By Denise Lavoie, Associated Press

TEWKSBURY, Mass. — Like many businesses, Avid Technology Inc. lost one of its own in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Douglas Gowell, the company's director of new business development, was traveling to Los Angeles to promote a new product when Flight 175 slammed into the World Trade Center.

Avid employees struggled to cope with the loss of their co-worker and the frustration they felt over the attacks. But unlike most other companies, Avid was in a position to help.

The company loaned the FBI digital editing equipment that allowed investigators to enhance and sharpen video images of two of the hijackers taken hours before the attacks.

One of the images showed lead hijacker Mohamed Atta and another one of the hijackers, Abdulaziz Alomari, passing through a security checkpoint at the Portland, Maine, airport at 5:45 a.m. on Sept. 11. Hours later, they were at Logan International Airport in Boston.

In the weeks after the attacks, the airport image of Atta was shown repeatedly on televisions around the world.

Investigators used the enhanced images to retrace the hijackers' steps in Portland. Surveillance cameras filmed the pair at an automated teller machine, a gas station and a Wal-Mart store. The FBI released the images to the public, generating many tips from Portland residents who saw the pair the day before the attacks.

"They did a terrific job of enhancing some of the poor

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sept11.archive.org/

quality images we had of (the hijackers)," said Charles Prouty, special agent in charge of the Boston FBI office.

"It was a very critical part of the investigation," Prouty said. "We still, even to this day, can't say for sure why they were in Portland, but their training manual said, 'Don't come together, come from different directions to minimize the chance of detection.'"

Earlier this year, Prouty presented the FBI's Exceptional Public Service Award to Avid for its assistance in the investigation.

"We, like everybody else, wanted to be able to do something," said Chief Executive David Krall. "We were fortunate enough to be in a position where we could use our technology."

Avid's computer-based editing products are used to make films, television news videos and music recordings. The company has won an Oscar, Emmy and a Grammy.

Its forensic video products are used by more than 50 state, local and federal law enforcement agencies across the country. "dTective," the video-editing system developed by Avid and Ocean Systems of Burtonsville, Md., is used to stabilize shaky images, isolate images from multi-camera surveillance systems and adjust lighting to make sharper images.

The system was used last year in the case of Nathaniel Brazill, a 13-year-old Florida boy charged with killing his teacher.

The system was able to take time-lapsed video and turn it into real-time video, allowing the jury to see the boy's true gait and how long he pointed the gun at his teacher, said Grant Fredericks, Avid's manager of video forensic solutions.

During his trial, Brazill insisted that he only meant to scare the teacher and that the gun went off accidentally.

But the enhanced surveillance video showed the boy holding the gun for more than 10 seconds and pointing it at the teacher for four seconds more. He was convicted of second-degree murder.

"It was a multiplexed camera at the school, with a number of cameras recording to a single videotape," Fredericks said. "The difficulty was that the local police did not have the tools to view that videotape."

Avid employees will mark the anniversary of Sept. 11 by observing a moment of silence in memory of their

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colleague, Doug Gowell, 52.

Last week, the company installed a plaque for Gowell. Outside the company's headquarters, employees planted a tree for Gowell. At the foot of the tree is an American flag, with a wreath of yellow roses around a picture of a cross.

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