

ficer and president of operations. A prison outreach program sponsored by Cypress Systems was one of the touchstones that brought together Whitacre and his new employer.

Whitacre's education includes bachelor and master's degrees from Ohio State University and a Ph.D. in nutritional biochemistry from Cornell University, where his thesis adviser was renowned selenium researcher Dr. G.F. Combs Jr. His research at Cornell was related to the biochemical role of selenium at the cellular level in the prevention of diseases.

"It was five years of relationship building," said Paul Willis, Cypress Systems president. "There were numerous times we visited him. By that time, it was a very easy decision to offer a job to him." Willis said he knew that ultimately, his company would have to deal with fallout from Whitacre's convictions.

"Mark openly admits to his mistakes and wishes that things had turned out differently," Willis said in the news release announcing the addition of Whitacre to the company. "We are fully aware of the details of this case and Mark's specific involvement. We are strong believers in second chances, and Mark most certainly has earned the right to a second chance."

Willis additionally was impressed with Whitacre's attitude throughout his time in prison. "That's genuine," he said of Whitacre's apparent lack of anger or bitterness. "He's really accepted his responsibilities."

**Possible pardon**

Whitacre's case is well documented in hundreds of articles and has been the subject of two books.

Kurt Eichenwald, former *New York Times* reporter, wrote the book *The Informant* in 2000.

James Lieber, an experienced attorney, wrote the book *Rats in the Grain* in 2000. After finishing his book about Whitacre's role in the ADM case, Lieber became a strong supporter of Whitacre's and has been very involved with the lobbying effort for a presidential pardon.

Several former and current U.S. Department of Justice officials continue to lobby for presidential clemency or presidential pardon for Whitacre.

One of the most active in the pardon process is Dean Paisley, who was with the FBI for 25 years prior to his retirement and was the FBI supervisor of the ADM case. Paisley has frequent contact with the pardon attorney at the Justice Department and the White House Counsel's Office regarding clemency and pardon for Whitacre. He and Whitacre traveled to Washington, D.C., this March to make their case for a pardon with government lawyers.

Paisley feels strongly that Whitacre's case was minuscule compared to the ADM price-fixing case, and he is passionate about Whitacre receiving some type of recognition for his unprecedented and historic role in the ADM case.

In an April 6 *Decatur Herald & Review* article, Paisley went further in his praise of Whitacre, saying, "Had it not been for the fraud conviction, he would be a national hero. Well, he is a national hero."

**Movie with a lesson**

A motion picture is currently in development by Warner Bros. about Whitacre's role in the ADM case. It will be directed by Steven Soderbergh, and Matt Damon will play Whitacre. Filming for the *The Informant* started in April.

Whitacre has been involved in helping with trivial things related to the movie. He is not getting paid for his involvement and is not setting the tone or direction of the production.

Whitacre said he feels very fortunate to have his wife and family with

him after such a long prison term and to have a second chance at his career.

"It has been tremendous to have that support, and I am not sure if I deserved it. I also feel very lucky to have such support from all three FBI agents (Dean Paisley, Brian Shepard and Bob Herndon) and one of my former prosecutors. I have read all of their numerous pardon letters that were written to the White House, some as recent as March 2008, and some of them state that I am a national hero.

"I appreciate all of that very much. I really do. But make no mistake about it: I am not a hero, and young adults entering the business world need to learn from that. I was involved with criminal activity, and I went to prison for almost a decade. They need to realize that is the price we pay for our actions if they are the wrong actions," said Whitacre, who is adamant that he emerged from

the whole experience a better man.

"I do feel that I came out of prison a better person than what I went in as. My wife, family and friends would say that is true. I was very greedy and self-centered in my early and mid-30s. Three years working for the FBI (starting at age 35) and almost nine years of federal prison knocked all of that out of me. It also knocked the wind out of me, literally," he said.

As for what's ahead, Whitacre said he is just trying to do what small part he can for his family and for society. He said he wants to make the most of the years he has left.

"I know what it is like to lose years. Our three children have learned lots from my mistakes and from my openness to discuss it with them. I hope other young adults who watch the movie next year can learn the same," he said.

"The message is not as simple as 'Is he a hero or not?' It is more complicated than that, and hopefully, it will show that people can make mistakes simultaneously as they do heroic acts, that they can be punished with prison simultaneously as the FBI is pushing for a pardon during prison and that people can redeem themselves and be welcomed back into society with the support from the very people who put them in prison. This country was built on second chances. This is exactly what I received — a second chance," Whitacre said.

For a second chance to work, though, Whitacre said one must first admit to their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions. "I think my children learned that very well from me. Perhaps others can learn it, too, from the movie," he said.



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