COMPUTER CALLING
A Chance Meeting in A Foreign Airport Bar Led To Mike Corumia's Success.

Thanks to the suggestion of a stranger in a bar in Taiwan, Mike Corumia, at age 40, is enjoying the success of a computer business that literally started on his kitchen table.

In 1984 Corumia was sitting in an airport bar in Taiwan when a Taiwanese man approached him, and they began talking. Since the man was in the business of exporting computers and Corumia had been working as a computer programmer, they had a common interest.

And when the man offered his business card, saying, "When you get back to the States, why not import computers?" Corumia took it, stuffed it in his pocket and didn't think twice about it. "When I got back to Saudi Arabia, I threw it in a suitcase."

Because he was in Taiwan on vacation from a company in Saudi Arabia, he'd been traveling a lot and thinking only of returning to Louisiana, he wasn't interested in much else. "I'd been all over the country thousands of times. ... I just wanted to come back to Lafayette and settle down."

A year later his contract was up, and after doing a couple of other small jobs in the Philippines, California and Arkansas, he made it back to Louisiana. But he still wasn't happy. His new job in Ville Platte also called for a lot of traveling, and Corumia says by this time he was fed up with living out of a suitcase.

That's when he dug up the Taiwanese's business card, and that's what led to Compucomm Microcomputer, Corumia's four-year-old computer business.

As a child growing up in Crowley, Corumia had worked on radios and televisions with his father. He earned a degree from USL in computer programming and had already chatted up about 12 years of experience in computer programming when he decided to build his own computer.

To do this he needed to find cheap parts. That is, he needed the man he had met in the airport. So he called him in Taiwan and placed an order for computer parts. "At that time PCs were very expensive," Corumia says.

When Corumia's friends saw his computer, they wanted one too. Continuing to order from his friend in Taiwan, he began constructing computers for his friends. "Before I knew it I was making just as much money building computers as I was on my regular job."

The decision to go out on his own, though, came about when a Lafayette company, Kiesel Computer Services, placed an order. And from that moment, Corumia says, business has been nonstop.

Though he's still building computers, Corumia now specializes in computer repair, networking (when all computers in a company are linked together and all information can be shared), the repair and sale of computer printers and customized programming. He and his employees also teach classes in computer usage, both through his company and at USL.

On Monday, Jan. 10, Corumia opened another company, a sort of extension of Compucomm called CompuGraphics. This computer-aided design facility is just down the road from Compucomm on Heymann Boulevard, and he shares ownership with a friend, Don Olivier.

And as for the man in the airport bar, they're now good friends. "We are still in constant communication," Corumia says. The Taiwanese man is working out of Houston now, and Corumia continues to order from him. The two see each other whenever possible.

"It sounds like a rags to riches story," he says. "But I'm not rich."