

**Today's Forecast**  
"Aruba-esque"  
Clear, sunny skies for  
foreseeable future

# The Your Story Times

**Wednesday**  
Business Edition

VOLUME XLVII No. 7

December 31, 2007

50 cents

## The Prince of Printing

### Hard work, integrity fueled Michael Halm's career ascent

DES PLAINES, IL— In the past 38 years, Michael D. Halm has cast a long shadow on the printing industry. The self-made entrepreneur climbed steadily through the industry ranks before setting new standards in quality and service with industry leader Creative Printing Services, Inc.

In retrospect, Halm's ethic of hard work, persistence, and fair dealing makes his career success seem like a foregone conclusion. However, when he stepped out of college in 1969 and into the working world, Halm's path was far from inevitable.



Michael Halm was ready to become a truck driver. After 39 job interviews, numerous intelligence tests, and 5 or 6 offers for jobs he didn't want, from banking to insurance, he took his last 700 dollars out of the bank, preparing to sign up for truck driving school.

After returning from the bank on that fateful day, Halm received another call from the employment agency that he had just about had enough of. "I think I found something you'd really like," the woman told him. So he humored her and went on one last interview, this time at R. R. Donnelley, a printing company. They gave him the Wonderlic Test—a test he knew inside and out after so many interviews—and aced it. "They thought they had a boy genius," Halm recalled. He was hired, and a memorable career in the printing industry had begun.

Halm began his first job under the supervision of Herb Niemeck, a small man who smoked big cigars. He was put in charge of sequencing the print runs for regional editions of Life Magazine. The job required mathematical ability, one of Halm's strong suits, and he took to it quickly.

Halm's first lesson in customer service came early one morning, when he arrived to find that Niemeck was piping mad. A set of molds that had been produced the night before, which Halm had put in the messenger pouch, had not arrived at R. R. Donnelley's East Coast facility. Having personally dropped off the molds, Halm was mystified.



**Halm's winning personality has brought him great success.**

Halm learned his lesson: always follow through to the end of the job. This lesson served him well when he moved on from Donnelley a few years later and on to sales in companies such as UARCO and Wallace Press.

The intensity he brought to his work caught his employers' eyes. At Wallace Press, Halm was known to arrive at work at 6:30 each morning to plan his day, and he often would be on the street making sales calls before his peers arrived



**Michael Halm's persistent sales calls led to many satisfied customers, and growing revenues for his employers.**

in the morning.

"The managers would say, 'Geez, Mike Halm made 12 cold calls today—how many cold calls did you make?'" recalled Don Snyder, who worked as a sales trainee alongside Halm at the time. "He had a work ethic that was different than anybody I'd ever met."

Halm's drive to succeed grew as his family grew. When daughter Isabel was born, he needed extra income, so he began working the late shift at a Best Western hotel seven days a week. Then, when he needed a new roof on his house, he negotiated a lower price by offering to help the roofer. Soon, he was working for the roofer as a laborer on the weekends.

"I was working 104 hours a week, minimum," Halm recalled. "I had plastic shoes, and polyester suits, and my car wouldn't run all the time, but I found a way to get through it."

On the sales end, Halm never tired of finding new ways to serve his customers. If customers said no to his proposals, he would search for other ways to help them solve problems.

"He understood his business so well," Snyder said. "He knew exactly what the customer needed before the customer knew it."

Halm's drive to succeed paid off handsomely for his employers. In UARCO's business forms division, he helped increase sales from \$200,000 to more than \$1/2 million annually. Later, working for Johnson and Quinn, he produced 20 new accounts, generating more than \$1 million in new business for the company. Then he moved on to FCL Graphics and quickly became their top salesman.

However, in the back of his mind, Halm heard what his father had told him: "You can make a nice living working for someone else, but you'll never get rich. You've got to do it yourself if you want to make some money."



Realizing that he was reaching his ceiling as a salesman for other companies, Halm began hatching a plan to strike out on his own. He found partners in John Chesney, Frank LaMontagna, and Frank Kupiec. After extensive research, they found a printing company that was going through a foreclosure, and bought it.

Their new company, Creative Printing Services, Inc., opened its doors in May, 1985, with 17 employees and two presses. Business grew quickly, and in four years they had outgrown the 13,000-square-foot building and moved to a larger building in Des Plaines. Then they expanded to a second building.

Today, Creative Printing Services employs 170 employees and boasts revenues of about \$27 million annually. Much of that business, of course, is the result of Halm's sales ability—in 2006, he produced \$5.6 million in sales.

In addition to his sales acumen, Halm's amazing mathematical abilities (he was known to do mathematical calculations in his head for fun) have served him in managing the finances of the business. Snyder, who joined forces with Halm at CPS and is now Vice President of Sales, recalled one occasion when, in the midst of a legal proceeding, his ability to rattle off figures astonished the judge.

"[The judge] said, 'Did you memorize all these numbers?'" Snyder recalled. "And Mike said, 'No, I'm doing the numbers in my head right now.'"

Even more crucial to Halm's success, both professionally and personally, has been his integrity. "If you looked in a dictionary under the word *integrity*, I'm pretty sure you'd find his picture in there," Snyder said.

Helping him out along the way have been a number of employees who have impressed him with their work ethic and ability. "They just gave it their all," Halm said. "Hardworking, ethical, and honest."

While he can be a demanding and uncompromising employer—Halm views himself as a "benevolent autocrat"—he places the highest priority on treating employees well. Receptionist



**Michael Halm and his wife follow the winds to Aruba.**

Claire Smith, a family friend whom Halm recruited in 1998, appreciates his thoughtfulness with the little things, including bringing her split pea soup from the Black Ram Steakhouse every Wednesday. "He's been very good to me," Smith said.

Halm has reached the top of a challenging industry, and now he can see the light at the end of the tunnel—a future retirement that promises no contract demands, customers to please, or employees to manage. Just relaxation, enjoyment of life with friends and family, and days marked by golf and reading by the pool.

"It was a great run," Halm said. "Thank you to all of those who helped make this possible for my wife and family."