

Ready, Willing and Able

BY CHERYL ADAMS

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MARINES ARE trained to do things differently. That elite, specialized training usually changes the lives of its members forever. This unique experience impacts the way Marines operate, the way they look at their lives—and how they live them—long after they’ve left the Corps.

Al Swanson was a Marine. As a young man, he served a three-year tour in the late 1950s (including duty as a driver for Richard Nixon on his 1958 trip to Latin America). When Swanson got out of the

nearby, and none were open. She had a big job (two large booklets, 50,000 copies a piece) that needed to be printed right away, and she was overjoyed to have found a printing company that was open.

Kim Swanson, Al’s wife (and president of Star Print since 1995), jumped to action, immediately visiting and consulting with the client. Star Print got the job, which turned out to be a very lucrative and long-lasting account.

While Kim never served in the military, it’s clear that she could

Swanson holds the business reigns, with the support and assistance of Swanson Jr.

There are 27 employees at Star Print & Mail, including a programmer who specializes in postal issues, such as mailing rates, as well as variable data projects. The company, which was established in 1906 and whose original claim to fame included producing racy burlesque posters for New York and Philadelphia saloons, offers offset and digital printing, a complete bindery and a wide range of mailing services.

Clients include national and local corporations, colleges and universities, ad agencies, non-profit groups and general commercial accounts. Interestingly, with all the services that Star Print has to offer, there is no marketing person.

“Our marketing is done mostly by word of mouth,” explains Swanson Sr., noting that the 102-year-old company has had a long time for word to get around. Even without a marketing director, the company

had enough volume to fill its two Heidelberg Speedmasters, both six-color, 40” perfectors, one with an aqueous coater.

A surge in sales came in August 2006, when the Swansons installed an HP Indigo 5000 digital press and expanded into variable data printing and direct mail services. (The company had been offering “mailing” services since 1998, but was limited to black-and-white addressing only.) To promote its newly expanded capabilities (literally, in a word), “Mail” was added to the company’s name.

Volume increased incrementally with the addition of its digital product offerings. However, six months into the Indigo’s operation, the Swansons realized that there was “a gap” in the production process: the mid-range runs between its high-volume Heidelbergs and short

runs on the Indigo.

“We were losing market share in that gap area, and we needed to be able to economically print runs of 1,000 to 30,000,” explains Swanson Sr. “There was a Presstek direct imaging (DI) press being demonstrated in nearby King of Prussia [PA], so we went to see it. Once we saw it in action, we knew we needed it and had to take the step forward. We considered other DI technology, but Presstek had the newest, most modern DI press on the market.”

Modernize, Digitalize

The big key is speed, adds Swanson Jr. “Twenty-minute makeready, using 20 sheets of paper, on the Presstek vs. 2½ hours and 1,000 sheets on the Heidelberg. That’s a huge cost savings in makeready. And, it still makes smaller jobs look like high-end pieces.”

As far as the Swansons know, their Presstek 52 DI is the only one in the Delaware Valley. “The DI press allows us to be really competitive, in part because the color and quality are so good,” Kim adds. “And it allows us to make money, too, because it’s economical—and eco-friendly—to use.”

Now that Star Print & Mail is FSC certified and has pumped up its greening initiatives, Kim says, the company is winning clients it didn’t have before going green. Others customers seek out the company because of its arsenal of mailing and fulfillment equipment. Still others pursue the printer because of its extensive finishing capabilities, which include everything from saddlestitching, to perfect and spiral binding, to folding, cutting and diecutting.

Last, but far from least, many clients seek out Star Print & Mail because of its overall appeal. “Ours is a small, personal company that quickly provides a quality product at a competitive price, using the latest in technology—and, above all, offers excellent customer service,” she concludes.

Always ready, willing and able to provide the utmost in customer service—because who would expect less from a Marine and his family?

PI



The Swanson family purchased a new Presstek DI press to digitally produce mid-range runs of up to 30,000. Pictured here with the press, from the left, are Al Swanson Sr., Kim Swanson and Allan Swanson Jr.

Corps, he accepted the non-heroic job of selling ladies shoes, before landing a job in printing, which, ultimately, turned into a successful career spanning 50 years.

On November 20, 1998, Swanson’s Marine Corps training paid off in a very big way. It was the day after Thanksgiving, and Swanson was doing what he always did: He was working. As CEO of West Chester, PA-based Star Print & Mail, he kept his business open on “Thanksgiving Friday”—it was a personal rule of the former Marine. He knew that many businesses were closed, and his employees could get a lot of work done without the normal busyness of a regular workday.

The telephone rang, and it was a mega corporation, headquartered outside of Philadelphia. The print buyer on the phone was exasperated. She had called all of the printers

have—and, probably, would have with the greatest of ease. With a background in fine arts, a go-getter personality and lots of hard work, Kim grew the company’s annual sales from \$100,000 in 1987, when she first started selling print, to the \$3.6 million it does today.

Following the Lead

Allan Swanson Jr., who is vice president and doubles as production manager/estimator, grew up with printing in his blood; so much so, that many of his relatives tease that he might have been born in the back room of a print shop. He certainly grew up there as a small child, coming in with his father on weeknights, weekends and during the summers.

Today, Swanson Sr., who purchased the company in 1978, is readying for retirement. Kim