

Ben E. Grey, CGCM

From "Abomination" to In-plant Dynamo

For his devotion to the printed craft, Ben Grey has been chosen In-Plant Reproductions' 1989 Industry Leader of the Year.

Packing his suitcase for yet another excursion across the country, Ben Grey radiates energy—a youthful energy that comes from loving his work.

Ben gladly accepts his mission, loads up his two-tone, Datsun 280-Z T-top, turbo sports car and races off to another exciting in-plant seminar.

IF LIFE is lived by doing, then Ben Grey has lived a lot. Born in Clyde, Ohio, Ben's family etched out a modest living by growing vegetables on their small farm. Reminiscing about that time in his life, Ben says he always knew that farming was not for him. "I wasn't sure about what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew that I didn't want to dig in the mud on my daddy's farm and have warm, squishy stuff oozing from in between my toes when I walked," he muses. "I became a printer because I found something I didn't like to do—farming."

A classified advertisement in the Clyde Express turned out to be Ben's ticket off the farm. The 11-year-old applied for a position as a printer's devil making \$3.75 a week working before and after school and all day Saturday. Ben ended up serving a six-year apprenticeship before leaving the Midwest. Herr Becker, a German Master Printer, told Ben angrily that six years of study was not enough time to learn the craft of printing. "He said I was an abomination being released on the industry," Ben jokes.

An adventurous youth, Ben once pooled his savings along with a friend's, and purchased a Waco bi-wing airplane from an ex-wing-walker who slipped-up on the job—earning himself a pair of permanent wings. With a philosophy of life that parallels his flying skills, Ben strives to live every moment to its fullest and throw caution to the wind. "My only goal in flying was simply to glide above the tops of the trees and below the birds flying above me," he says.

At the age of 14, the lure of the big city and a better



life overwhelmed him, so Ben ran away from home. His next stop was Philadelphia. The city was intoxicating to Ben who went to work on the loading docks of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* as a flyboy. "I used to catch the papers as they came off the press and load them onto a skid. It paid about \$2 an hour—which was a man's wage back then."

Runs In-plant at Sea

Ben's next calling was from his country. Drafted into the Navy, Ben was assigned to head up printing operations on the U.S.S. Mississippi, a ship that tested equipment and chemical products among other

things. Working three shifts around the clock, the floating in-plant was responsible for reproducing all the ship's product documentation as well as testing new presses for durability at sea. In fact, Ben was the first man in history to use a model 40 and a model 1250 Multilith press shipside.

Four years later, Ben began managing the printing department at the Chesapeake Public School System in Virginia. Most of his staff comprised of vocational technical students. Realizing the tremendous value of hands-on experience to young printers, Ben offered his shop as a testing ground for new products and equipment. "We used to try out new presses at the school for A.B. Dick. We kept a tape recorder next to the machine so anytime something had to be adjusted or fixed we voiced the problem on tape. That kind of



information is invaluable to the manufacturer and offers the students experience and education," Ben says.

His 36 years as Chesapeake's print shop coordinator/instructor gave Ben the opportunity to write instruction manuals, books and hundreds of magazine articles about the industry, including works that have appeared in British, Australian and New Zealand publications. More than 200 of his "how-to", management and feature articles have been published for IN-PLANT Reproductions, where he has been a contributing editor for over 20 years.

A high honors graduate of the College of William and Mary and a certified graphic communications manager (CGCM), Ben has been bestowed with over 30 national awards including a Neographics award in 1988 from the Graphic Arts Association and two Golden Key's from the International Association of Printing House Craftsmen for his contributions to the in-plant industry. In 1987, Ben was honored with an In-Plant Management Association (IPMA) Fellow citation in recognition of his dedication. Only five individuals have achieved the coveted Fellow status in IPMA's 25-year history.

"I've accomplished a lot, but it doesn't mean a thing unless I'm standing in front of someone, and I can help them," Ben explains.

In addition to his credits, Ben has traveled extensively and has taken his expertise on the road in a series of lectures to many IPMA regional and international conferences. Part of his service to the industry has involved years of consulting work for several companies including A.B. Dick, Van Son Holland Ink,

various government agencies and private sector in-plants, as well as conducting seminars for more than 11 years for Dynamic Graphics Educational Foundation (DGEF). Ben has also contributed and is a founding father and charter member of the Tidewater Chapter of IPMA in Virginia. "I think it is important to share knowledge if you have it—that's part of the responsibility," he says.

Ben is also credited with originating and teaching the nation's first adult education course about in-plant printing for Old Dominion University's School of Management.

"Ben loves the printing craft. Printer's ink has been underneath his fingernails since he was a youngster," says IPMA president Robert Beard. "Whenever IPMA needs Ben to speak we can always count on him

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one way or another. I think he feels that he owes something back to the industry in exchange for all it's done for him."

"Ben is the main reason I got into in-plant consulting," says in-plant expert Jack Klasnic. "When I found out he was the in-plant sex symbol, I

figured I'd better get involved to save the industry," he jokes.

"But seriously, Ben is a pure, class act who has done more for the in-plant industry, over a long period of time, than anybody I know," says Klasnic, a friend and long-time associate. "He is always willing to spend time with anyone who needs assistance. I think it is great that the "Leader of the Year" award is being given to the man who helped establish the in-plant industry," he adds. "Ben is getting this award for his many, many years of contributions to the industry."

Van Son Ink used Ben's in-plant and printing expertise for a five-year project that logged him over a half million miles, criss-crossing the country to conduct seminars, attend IPMA chapter meetings and major trade shows.

"Ben's reputation preceeds him," says Joe Bendowski, vice president of national sales at Van Son. "His seminar audiences really identify with him because they feel that he's one of them. He's a very dynamic speaker and his enthusiasm is non-stop. I think Ben's "Leader of the Year" recognition is wonderful—and long overdue," he adds.

The telephone rings, another in-plant beacons, and once again, Ben loads up the sports car he dreamed of as a kid and, with a twinkle in his blue-gray eyes, is happy to be off and flying again.

"As long as I can think clearly, I'll continue to work because I love it," Ben says smiling. "When I grow up, I have high hopes of becoming a printer."

by MICHAEL ROSS DOMINICIS