

The What's Happening Interview:

This week What's Happening introduces a new feature, The What's Happening Interview. Periodically we'll be talking to people in the area who excel at what they do, or maybe just do it differently from everyone else. If you know of someone who has interesting views about a subject, who for some reason might make an interesting candidate, by all means give us a call.

PHOTOS BY CARY GRONER

Advertising A Cappelli

by Cary Groner



BRUCE CAPPELLI lounges in a comfortable chair in an unfinished office in an unfinished building, talking about unfinished business. His pink shirt matches his argyles. A new beard adorns his face. He's relaxed, but he isn't entirely satisfied. Relationships. The young man who's climbed to the pinnacle of the Eugene advertising business at age 33 is realizing that a 14-hour-a-day marriage to his company may not be the healthiest of human interactions, and he's ready to do something about it.

Cappelli/Miles/Wiltz/Avery/Kelly is the city's largest advertising agency, with annual billings of \$8 million. Along with moving it into a brand new office, Cappelli is restructuring things so that he can delegate the management functions of the firm and concentrate his energies in the creative arena. This should, theoretically, leave him a moment or two to cultivate something besides business.

Cappelli was born in the Bay Area and moved to Hillsboro when he was 12. He spent summers doing farm work, and now maintains that "Bucking bales and lifting irrigation pipe gives you a real appreciation for a white-collar job." After getting interested in advertising at the U of O, he entered the J-school, where he won a couple of scholarships. After graduation and a brief internship in Portland, he became convinced that he could do the work he loved and have a considerably more decent life in Eugene. He went to work for Jerry Schmidt at Advertising Services. When Schmidt decided he wanted out of the business

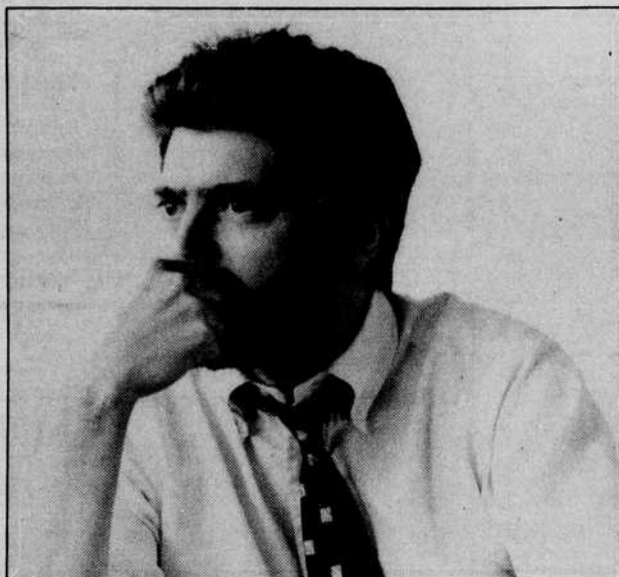
a few years later, Cappelli, Rod Miles, and Kathy Wiltz bought him out.

Though he would probably detest the label, Cappelli is a kind of new-age capitalist. He had profited handsomely by the free-enterprise system, primarily because he's augmented his own considerable talents by attracting the best and the brightest in the area; and he's been able to keep them precisely because they are not exploited, but treated like human beings and paid very well.

In this particular office, which may or may not be his, but on this day seems to be the only one with any furniture in it, he talks about himself, his business, and what led him to where he is today.

WHAT'S HAPPENING: What got you interested?

CAPPELLI: I always enjoyed writing. I wanted to be the next Kurt Vonnegut. You have to put this in the context of the times, too: 1968-72, the war in Vietnam. I ended up going to college because I didn't have any better alternative. I took a lot of things that were interesting to me; sociology, psychology, broadcast classes. We were just coming out of Cesar Chavez marching on the EMU



and boycotting iceberg lettuce and grapes. It made me make a choice: Did I want to stick with a socialist perspective on life, that we should all be equal and all the same, everybody sharing everything; or should you be competitive, and be rewarded for your own skills and contribution? I thought you should be evaluated on what you contribute, and be rewarded accordingly. Which made me a raving capitalist, and I came totally out of that camp and into this one.

WH: What are your ideals about advertising?

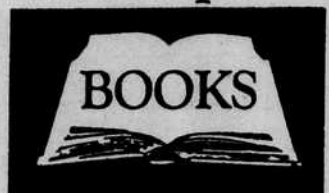
CAPPELLI: Advertising needs to be an honest, accurate, compelling vision of the service or product you're selling. It's a perfect representation of what free enterprise is all about. A good ad is one that stops me, gets my attention, that I can relate to on some level. It's usually a combination of emotion and intellect working together. How can I best communicate the image of this product or service considering what's important to the audience?

WH: Have you had any particularly satisfying successes?

CAPPELLI: Lane Transit District has to rank right up there. We'd like to set up an umbrella of positive awareness in the community that Lane Transit District is viable as a transportation company, that it meets the needs of a lot of people, that it's a good community citizen. Prior to our first campaign, probably about 1978, our research showed that about 36 percent of the population—no matter how convenient you made it—wouldn't ride the bus. After our ads ran for six weeks, the negative figure had dropped to 12 percent. You have to push a person's perception before you can push their behavior. As the system's streamlined and cut

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