



Courtesy Photo

# Peddling Books 'til Dusk

Mention of the tradition-rich Southwestern Co. brings forth a wide range of opinions and reactions.

BY B.J. THOMSEN

University student Steve Porter got a job with Southwestern Co. selling educational material in the Midwest two summers ago. He cleared \$8,400, enough to carry him for the entire school year. He returned the next year, worked for six weeks of the 12-week selling season before returning home because of a broken knee. Despite the injury he still grossed more than \$6,800.

"It's the best thing I've ever done," he says. "... that's what made my resume." Porter recently secured a job with Kodak Corp.

University student Patrick Carey got a job with Southwestern Co. selling educational material in the Midwest last summer. He figures he lost a thousand dollars. When he was working he figures he made 50-75 cents an hour.

Ten of 13 students in Carey's team never finished the 12-week selling season. Half quit within the first two weeks. Carey was picked up by police and dropped off at the county line twice for selling door-to-door in Cherryvale, Kan. From there he had to walk back to Independence where he was living with a family who agreed to take him and two others from his team in for the summer. They worked the surrounding area selling the Volume Library, essentially a two-volume condensed encyclopedia.

Last summer several University students who found summer work with Southwestern, a company based in Nashville, Tenn. that recruits college students to sell door-to-door, had problems similar to those of Carey. The year before, during the summer of 1985, all 14 University students that Southwestern recruited finished the summer and grossed more than \$6,000.

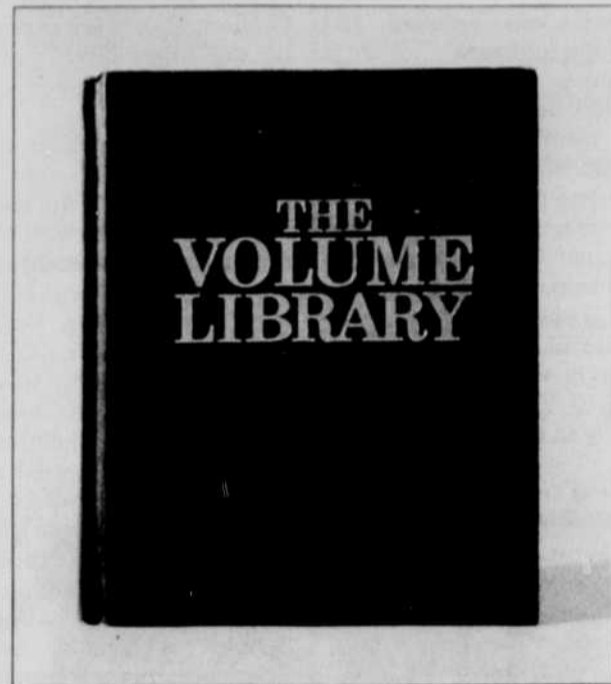
The company is not well known in the West because only in the last 20 years or so has the company extended its range beyond the Midwest, according to Jeff Rodgers, district sales manager for Southwestern. This, he says, is due largely to the fact that more college students have cars than ever before. In the late 1960s, University graduate Dr. Kinley Snyder was the first student from the region to sell for the company, according to Steve Davis, district sales manager for the Northwest region.

The Southwestern Co. first became prominent in the southeastern United States in 1861 when it

printed bibles for Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. After the war the company began hiring college students to sell books door-to-door, a practice that has continued to the present day. The earliest copyright on the Volume Library was 1917; before this the company primarily sold religious material, which they still do in part of the country.

Southwestern now recruits at 14 universities in the Northwest and employs 3,200 students from 400 universities across the nation each summer, according to Rodgers. Davis says he works with around 200 college students from the Northwest each summer.

"Southwestern probably provides summer work for more college students than any other company in the nation," the sales manual boasts.



Paul Squire, one of more than 80 University students who worked for the company last summer, is returning this summer as a student manager. With him he will take a team of first-year dealers recruited throughout the year at the University by him and others student managers.

Students learn about the company in one of several ways: anonymous letter, word of mouth, classified ad or by filling out an interest card after which the student is contacted by a student manager who invites them to a meeting.

These introductory meetings are held each week throughout the school year. At the meetings Jeff

Rodgers tells students about the program and the product. He stresses things like good money, good experience, the chance to travel, advancement and college credit as the advantages of working for Southwestern. He also tells students they will be expected to work six days a week and that if they expect to be successful they should sell until 9:30 p.m.

Directly after the meetings interested students meet a student manager. Some will be hired on the spot.

After a student signs a contract they meet each week during the remaining school year with someone, usually their student manager, who has sold for the company before. At these meetings they begin learning how to sell the product.

Finally, all students recruited from the University during the year will meet on Thursday or Friday of finals week and from there they begin a marathon 50 hour plus journey to sales school in Nashville. Students make the journey non-stop in their own cars and at their own expense, and are required to bring an additional \$250 to cover traveling expenses and lodging while at the school.

Once in Nashville students undergo five days of intense instruction on sales techniques to be used during twelve, 80-hour weeks of door-to-door selling during the summer in their designated area.

According to Davis, the company will conduct eight sales school sessions this spring. More than 900 students from around the nation are attending the school this week, he says.

The students from the University who went last year were divided primarily between Kansas and Texas. This year Rodgers says the group will either head for upstate New York or the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

At sales school students learn how to answer every objection from a potential customer. For example, in the sales and business management manual that students are given at sales school, there are six responses to "I can't afford it."

Students are taught how to approach certain situations and are given step-by-step detailed written instructions on how to make each presentation.

There are seven distinct steps to making each presentation and following it through to the end.

The "pre-approach" step consists of finding out from each family visited the particulars of who lives down the street, the number of children in each family, their names, where they go to school, where the family goes to church and so on. This way when the student dealer moves to the next house he or she knows all about the family. And talking to other people in the neighborhood puts prospective customers

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