

Potential entrepreneurs could learn a lot from Bill Dickey. The gay Portland businessman has been at the top of the game, and he has watched the bottom fall out. He has been praised, just as he has been criticized. And he always manages to get back up, brush himself off and find another business project to tackle.

Dickey was a key figure in the Portland restaurant and bar scene during the 1980s and '90s, bringing the city popular establishments such as the Dakota Club and the Caribou Club. He sold his last bar Jan. 1, 1995, and went into a self-imposed exile of sorts, but the man certainly didn't drift away. He went to work for a printing company and then in 1998 decided to go back to work for himself again, opening BDC Printing Solutions.

Since that time, the entrepreneurial bug has taken over again, and he has expanded. This year he and two partners also opened Big Deal Creative Marketing, which focuses on specialty promotional products but offers other services as well.

As if that were not enough, drawing on his experience from the days when he was in the bar scene, Dickey also operates Bartender Direct Company (yep, another BDC acronym), which offers alcoholic beverage management services to large events such as the Taste of Beaverton. "I don't think anyone in Oregon pours more beer than we do," he says.

How does someone like Dickey go from the restaurant and bar scene to the printing industry? It wasn't necessarily easy, nor was it a specific plan: He just did what he had to do.

"It's about successes and failures," he says. "I've just kept trying to save myself from the failures and not feel defeated by them. Early on I think I did myself a big disservice getting too well known. I put myself on the line and didn't want to fail, so I just kept doing new things...I kept trying."

Dickey moved to Portland in the early 1980s and went to work as a bartender. In 1986 he opened the first establishment, the Dakota Club, on his own.

"Between 1987 and 1989 I think we were the busiest bar in Portland," he says. "It was crazy."

The Dakota Club, which was located on the corner of Southwest Broadway and Oak Street, became Hamburger Mary's after Dickey sold it. He later would open the North Dakota, Max's and the Caribou Club.

## BILL OF RIGHTS

Politically active businessman expands his empire by Tom Stevenson



Bill Dickey helps Basic Rights Oregon raise money during the Oregonians Against Discrimination Luncheon

Dickey did two things early on that he says had a major effect on his business life. First, he made the decision that he would be involved in civic activities.

He served on committees, boards and panels galore—and not just in the queer community. He was involved in downtown business and Pioneer Courthouse Square groups. He became active in gay organizations such as Basic Rights

Oregon. He also is heavily involved in Democratic political circles. And that is just a small fraction of the activities.

The other thing Dickey did from the beginning was to be open and honest about his sexuality. Matthew Lashua, one of the employees at Big Deal Creative Marketing, says it was important for people to realize none of his bars or restaurants were solely gay venues. "He was successful running straight establishments [although they were all gay-friendly], and I think that says a lot about him."

Still, Dickey found himself exhausted trying to

juggle all of the pieces of his life with the realities that accompany owning restaurants and bars.

"I got caught up in the bar world," he says.

**"If you're going to be successful at business you have to be involved in the community"**

—Bill Dickey

"It ruled my life even though I didn't want it to. It was a nightmare to try and manage everything and also stay involved in the community."

After Dickey made the move from bars and restaurants to printing, he simply withdrew somewhat and caught his breath. In his mind, his attitude really didn't change, but the methods he would use to accomplish his personal goals would.

"The second time around I wanted to be low-key," says Dickey, who is single but still works every day with his former partner. "I didn't want to make myself a target. But I still wanted to be successful enough that I could generously give back to the community. If you're going to be successful at business you have to be involved in the community. You have to plow back time, energy and money."

Dickey's latest business endeavors certainly

prove he hasn't slowed down. BDC Printing Solutions is actually more of a brokerage firm in which he and his employees determine their customers' needs, then go out and find the companies to do the actual printing.

Those needs include everything from hundreds of business cards to thousands of forms to millions of labels. Many of Dickey's clients also use him to handle direct mailing and other services, and BDC can help find folks to handle writing and design if necessary.

"We don't have the presses," he says. "Printing brokers focus on one facet of the business. People like myself are general practitioners. I am a salesman. That's what I do best."

Ironically, Dickey credits one of his contacts from his days in the bar scene with giving him his big break in the printing industry. A Portland beer manufacturer gave him "hundreds of thousands of dollars" to help produce labels.

"They didn't just give it to me because they knew me," he says. "I had to really work to get the job. But it was the break I needed."

Dickey's business also has benefited from the many contacts he has made through the political arena. "We do a lot of work for campaigns," he says, noting he is "swamped" with orders during the election season.

Through his printing business, Dickey found out about advertising promotional products such as coffee mugs, pens, T-shirts and thousands of other items. He eventually purchased a distributorship but soon found himself overwhelmed.

As it turned out, however, Dickey was about to get a big break. Another company that offered similar products was going out of business, allowing him to latch onto some of its employees and gain partners Jon Potteet and Jay Howard in the process.

This led to the formation of Big Deal Creative, which Dickey says has been "going great guns" every since. It offers a plethora of services including copy writing, logo creation and marketing plans and works with both huge corporations and small "mom and pop" businesses.

"We are always evolving," Lashua says. "We are looking for ways to grow and expand. I think we've made a big impact in a short period of time."

Always evolving: That easily could be Bill Dickey's personal motto. ■

TOM STEVENSON is a Portland free-lance writer and a Portland State University student.

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