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MARCH/APRIL 2020

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**DULUTH
AREA CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE**

BY PATRICK LAPINSKI

MAKING A LASTING IMPRESSION

In the heart of downtown Duluth, Shel/Don Print, Signs & Design is celebrating 30 years of providing cutting-edge solutions for customers, as well as commitment to the community and local economy.

This company is driven to meet and exceed demand for high-quality printing and design services from local businesses and nationwide corporations. It handles everything from vehicle wraps and trade show displays to decals, manuals and full-scale mailer campaigns.

Shel/Don began as the brainchild of Alan and Susan Bradshaw, who saw an unmet need in Duluth for a company that could handle large architectural and engineering drawings and prints. While the Bradshaws were in the early stages of establishing their business, they were introduced to Dean Baltes, who is now Shel/Don's owner and president. Back then, he was a sales rep whose affiliation with Canon was of interest to the Bradshaws. In fact, Baltes sold them a lot of the equipment that was in the shop when it opened.

Baltes was working for Christie Lithograph & Printing Co. at the time, selling Canon copiers and A.B. Dick printing presses. In addition to providing Canon products, he worked as a sales representative for the A.B. Dick side of the business, which was owned by Dick and Jill Christie.

"That's when I met Alan and Susan, and we became pretty much life-long friends after that," Baltes said. After Christie Lithograph & Printing was sold



**SHEL/DON PRINT, SIGNS & DESIGN
CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF
SERVING CUSTOMERS**



to Ikon Office Solutions in 1995, he stayed on as a sales manager for another seven years.

In 2002, the Bradshaws began looking ahead to retirement and entered into an agreement with Baltes through which Susan Bradshaw mentored him. He was on track toward full ownership of the business, but sadly, she developed breast cancer. Baltes became Shel/Don's owner and president in 2002, and after his wife died in 2003, Alan Bradshaw sold his remaining shares in the company to Baltes.

Baltes noted the complementary nature of his business interests and experience and those of Alan Bradshaw. Baltes was an experienced sales representative, while Bradshaw was an experienced service technician who tinkered with technology as he and his wife developed the plan that established Shel/Don.

Baltes retained the Shel/Don name, which comes from a pairing of Shelly and Donald (the first names of the children of an early company investor). And while he's at the helm, he said, the company's name will always be Shel/Don.

Today, Shel/Don has a full house of expertise with 27 employees at its 124 E. Superior St. location. General Manager Jeanette Herubin recalled that 30 years ago, there weren't that many staffers. At that time, they were only renting a small 25-by-140-foot part of the building.

Herubin was hired the first year the company opened, when she was in college pursuing a business degree and working next-door at a restaurant/bar called Murphy's. That's where she met the Bradshaws and their staff, because they'd pop over for lunch or stop in after work for a beer. They'd gotten to know each other fairly well, and when the Bradshaws offered Herubin a job in the print shop, she accepted.

Handling large engineering prints was Shel/Don's specialty in the early years. They had an old copy

machine that made great copies, but it couldn't collate. Herubin recalled one job they had for AT&T to scale big prints down to an 11-by-17-inch size and make 50 copies. "We would put them around a big table, and then we'd have to run around the table and collate by hand. And that's what I did for about three months," she laughed.

Whatever the product – whether it's a banner, an indoor or outdoor sign, a vehicle graphic, trade show display, corporate human resources

manual or a direct mailer – there must be relevance in its design that leaves a lasting impression on the customers (or potential customers) of Shel/Don's clients. This dedication to clients' brand identity, color integrity and consistency across all print platforms is at the heart of Shel/Don's customer service philosophy.

The company's full-service commercial print and copy center provides one- to four-color offset printing, digital color, wide format engineering and black-and-white copying. Pre-press graphic design



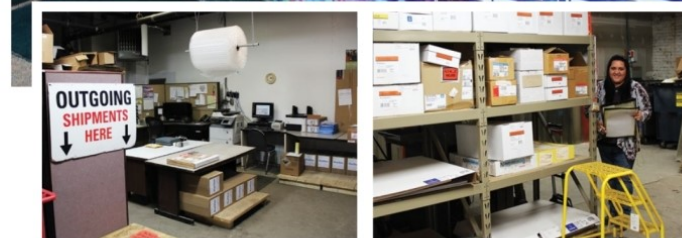
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– GENERAL MANAGER JEANETTE HERUBIN



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The development of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s – which popularized internet use among the public – also ushered in the advent of on-demand digital printing. To prepare for this new wave of technology, Shel/Don added a whole line of complementary services and a team of experienced graphic designers. And that wasn't an accident, says Herubin. "We really have a solution-based, proactive approach to selling because we want to be always at the top of what we do," she noted.





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– SALES AND MARKETING MANAGER DEAN LUOMA

and bindery services are also provided in-house in addition to mailing services.

Shel/Don Sales and Marketing Manager Dean Luoma agrees that it’s all about the customer experience. “We like to understand what our customer is trying to accomplish on a project rather than just take a print order,” he explained. “At Shel/Don, we’re interested in understanding a customer’s needs so we can offer experienced solutions and possibly a better or more cost-effective way. We want to find out what their primary goal is. If it’s an image thing, we want to make sure their image is consistent – that their branding is consistent.”

Shel/Don prides itself on providing the highest quality customer



experience on every job. The company’s founders invested in the future when they started out 30 years ago, and today, Shel/Don follows that example. “We’re expanding our website for more online ordering to make it even easier for the customer,” Luoma noted as just one example. There’s a need for items that can be ordered

online, so the company is streamlining the whole process to integrate it into its business software. “It’s just going to make things a lot more efficient,” he added. “Efficiency – that’s the wave of the future.”

Shel/Don’s new website will allow customers and potential customers to request an estimate, place an order, request help for their projects, and review their projects before Shel/Don completes the final product order for them.

Out on the production floor is where the product magic happens. This is where Production Manager Robert Chesser keeps everything in motion. It begins with having the best equipment, he emphasized.

“Dean [Luoma] has a knack of trying to find the best,” said Chesser. “In our sign shop, we have the best flatbed printer made – an Océ Arizona 318 GL. It can print up to a four-foot-by-eight-foot sheet of any rigid



material up to two inches thick." The printer also provides the advantage of printing directly on the material, rather than printing on adhesive material that must then be mounted on the product.

A Swiss-made 3D cutter called the Zünd is among the emerging technologies available at Shel/Don, which is the only shop north of Minneapolis to offer its incredible functionality. The Zünd is a modern, high-end machine capable of precise die cuts on the most rugged of materials. All of Shel/Don's cut sheet digital products are G7 certified (the highest industry standard ensuring color quality and consistency). The company also invests in the best equipment to make employees' work run smoothly and efficiently, because

they're not worried about a machine breaking down. "They're built better, last longer and do a better job," Chesser said. "It just kind of portrays the way we are; we want to do the best possible job for our customers."

"We always go best-in-class, even when it isn't fun to spend money," said Baltes in referring to economic recession years. "We steered the course during the recession and we kept investing in the best-in-class equipment."

But there was a time when that philosophy wasn't shared in the industry as a whole, he noted. That was in the 1980s, the age of the quick-print chains. They were on almost every corner, offering low-cost, high-volume printing, and they undercut a lot of local printing

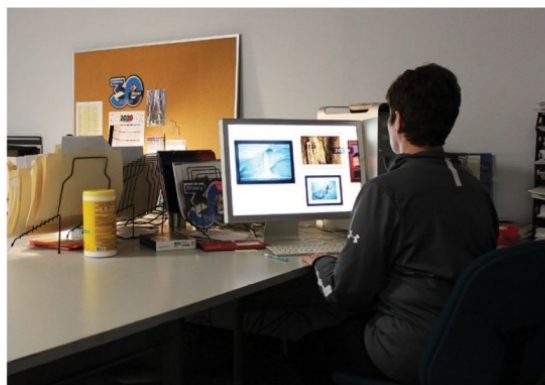
companies. There were several such quick-print stores in downtown Duluth competing against Shel/Don.

Then the Great Recession really hit in 2008, and Baltes wondered whether Shel/Don would be able to remain in business. The economy was dire. "There was a time from 2008 to 2011 that I would have bet you that we weren't going to survive," he said. In Minnesota, 2,800 printshops went out of business or ceased to exist as they were gobbled up through mergers and acquisitions or underwent bankruptcies.

Three decades later, Shel/Don remains firmly rooted at its long-time East Superior Street location. Like the company itself, the facility is designed for optimal efficiency, due

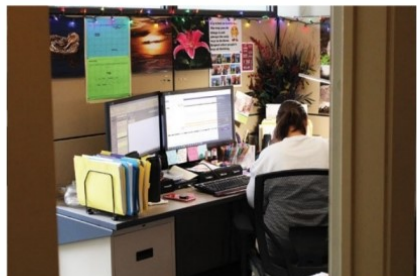


"In our sign shop, we have the best flatbed printer made – an Océ Arizona 318 GL."
– PRODUCTION MANAGER ROBERT CHESSER





“We do what we say we’re going to do. They [customers] would say that we have integrity in our promises.”
 – OWNER AND PRESIDENT DEAN BALTÉS



to its need to house the business’s heavy, sophisticated and vibration-sensitive equipment.

Two of the biggest challenges Shel/Don faced in its more recent history came from situations that were out of its control. One of them was a two-year reconstruction of Superior Street, which made accessing Shel/Don more difficult for customers, employees and suppliers. That was planned and manageable.

The second and most impactful, however, was The Last Place on Earth, which was right next-door to Shel/Don.

The Last Place on Earth’s sales of synthetic drugs resulted in its owner’s ongoing civil and very public battle with the City of Duluth and adjacent businesses. The press of reporters, bystanders and authorities was constant and disruptive for Shel/Don, making it difficult for the company’s employees and clients to carry on business as usual. The public was concerned about safety in that part of downtown Duluth, and the medical community was concerned about the health of those using the synthetic drug products. Ultimately, the shop was


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shut down and its owner received a lengthy prison sentence.

While this situation was particularly hard on the staff, Baltes said, both he and his employees learned through the adverse experiences.

"It helped us grow," he explained. "It helped us learn how to communicate and do business with our customers without them having to come into the store."

While it celebrates 30 years of doing business, Shel/Don is also looking to the future. "We're trying to help our customers use print to accomplish their goals. We try to ensure that our message and our product helps them communicate effectively with their audience," Baltes said. "We do not just look to provide a good product at a fair price in a set time-frame. We look to make sure our product is accomplishing the goals that they're set out to do."

Another dimension of the company is its work with and support of local nonprofit organizations. Shel/Don remains very involved with two initiatives that were important to Susan and Alan Bradshaw: events and causes supporting breast cancer research and the Animal Allies Humane Society.

"We love Animal Allies – we just love them," said Herubin. The company was proud to be part of Animal Allies' 2009 capital campaign for a new facility in which Shel/Don sponsors a cat suite.

Animal Allies, which is the nonprofit animal humane society serving the Duluth and southern St. Louis County area, has been associated with Shel/Don for nearly two decades. It's been a long and beneficial partnership, says Animal Allies Development Officer Michelle Carter.

"To have a business ... also giving back the way they do, I think that just speaks volumes of the people behind the scenes."

– DEVELOPMENT OFFICER MICHELLE CARTER,
ANIMAL ALLIES HUMANE SOCIETY

"When we were in the old facility, one of our volunteers said, 'We really need to put together a newsletter.' And as things happen in a small town, the folks at Shel/Don said, 'We'll help you with that,'" she explained about the start of the business relationship. "It started out with a one-page newsletter mailer going to a few hundred homes.

"They're wonderful," Carter said about the people of Shel/Don. "The product that they produce is just beautiful." She explained that

they meet four times a year to develop a marketing plan together and then work to accomplish the plan's goals.


"They are a local, family-owned, community business," said Carter, responding to the kittens climbing onto her lap to get a little love while she was being interviewed for this article. "And Animal Allies is local. In a world where you can easily find anything you want on the internet, we believe it's really important to keep relationships with people in our community and be part of the community that we're in. That's a big part of why we love working with Shel/Don.

"To have a business that has not only maintained and been very successful in our community also giving back the way they do, I think that just speaks volumes of the people behind the scenes making everything happen," Carter said. She thinks a big part of what keeps them working with Shel/Don is that they have a "generous heart and a strong belief in our community."

In addition, Shel/Don Print & Design is always staying up-to-date when it comes to both technology and business opportunities.

This company has weathered its share of adversity by always maintaining a steady focus on the customer. Thanks to its flexibility and resiliency, Shel/Don stands proudly as a 30-year member of the downtown business community.

Baltes continues to steer the course of success that's been his charter since he came onboard, because he's proud of Shel/Don employees and the quality of their work. He is also proud of the trust the business has earned from customers.

Shel/Don clients "value what we truly provide – the quality and the accuracy and never letting people down," he said. "We do what we say we're going to do. They would say that we have integrity in our promises." 

Patrick Lapinski is a Twin Ports-based freelance writer.



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