

YOU SAID

“I just got through reading the Group Stahl Focus front to back. Just wanted to drop you a line to tell you that it was informative & very well done. Looking forward to the next issue.”

BOB BROOKS
Process Improvement & IS Manager,
Transfer Express, Inc.

We welcome your feedback!
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COMPANY HERITAGE

The Story Behind Stahls' Transfer Express

▶ The roots of Transfer Express go back to 1978, the year that Mark and Helen Weaver decided to open a small screen print shop in Mentor, Ohio. As the father of two sons, Jeff and Tim, Mark had been heavily involved in the local Little League baseball organization. Part of Mark's league responsibilities included ordering uniforms and he was always astounded at the level of difficulty involved in getting them printed quickly and professionally. As a prelude to opening the screen printing business, Mark scouted out potential customers—in particular one large sporting goods store he had dealt with during his Little League years—and asked if they would try his uniform printing services. They agreed and the business soon developed a niche as a quality provider of custom printed uniforms. The success of the business was based on their ability to print small quantity orders, usually on other people's garments. Since printing mistakes meant absorbing the cost of the garment, they learned to print both quickly and carefully.

TIM JOINS THE FAMILY BUSINESS

In 1984, younger son Tim returned home from Ohio State University and became active in the family business (Jeff was by this time an ordained Catholic priest, working in the Cleveland diocese). Tim and his father incorporated the business under the name Weaver Screen Print. Tim remembers, “My father was an extremely hard worker and my mother was the glue that held the business together. Dad was a “hands-on” problem solver and Mom did all the books, made the phone calls and everything else that a business needs to survive,” recounts Tim. “I learned a lot from both of them.” (Tim's mother Helen still works at Transfer Express in the accounting department and “loves being around the young people.”)

LOSING CUSTOMERS OPENS A NEW DOOR

Tim's first bold move was convincing his father that the pricing structure they had was too low. “When we increased prices, we lost our two biggest accounts,” recalls Tim. “At the time, it seemed like the end of the

world. But in reality, losing these customers was a blessing in disguise, since it forced us to change our business model to something that could be even more successful.”

IDEA BOOK IS BORN

It was around this time that Tim started experimenting with the automation of printing transfers. Printing on paper was a considerably more cost effective method, and had less risk involved than direct printing on



Ted Stahl, Ricki Stahl, the late Mark Weaver, Tim Weaver and Helen Weaver. Photo taken in 1997.

garments. This is when the focus of the business changed from direct printing on garments to transfers. In 1986, Sue Wilcosky (today Transfer Express' Business Development Manager) joined the company. Tim recalls how they developed what would become the very first “Idea Book.”

“It always concerned me when customers would come into the art room and spend an inordinate amount of time developing their logos from scratch,” says Tim. “And then one day, a customer brought in a flyer featuring a popular logo and said ‘I want a design like this one, but with a few changes.’ It *continued on page 2*

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“We’re a team that plays to win, whether we’re introducing a new product, following a marketing plan or making it easier for our customers to do business with us.”

then occurred to me that people buy ideas, and that we could offer a great service to our customers if we made it easier for them to design their custom logos,” recounts Tim.

Sue agreed, and within a few days, she had created a two-page flyer featuring some very basic designs. “We published it, it worked, and the rest is history,” says Tim. “Our staff of designers added to the collection every year, and it grew and grew.” Since the Idea Book concept allowed them to easily take orders over the phone, new customers could be located anywhere. In order to test the template process, they placed an ad in Press Magazine. “We started getting calls from all over the country,” remembers Tim. “Before long, I noticed that we had received responses to the ad from every state in the country.” From this point on, the company grew on a steady basis, increasing sales every year.

TIM MEETS TED

In 1989 Tim wanted to accelerate growth even faster and met with Ted Stahl to discuss joint venture opportunities. “I’ve always said that Stahls’ was like the McDonald’s of the industry,” insists Tim, “with an established name and the ability to market products to our industry.” Weaver Screen Print had a product that the industry needed—easy to order custom trans-

fers. When McDonald’s began to sell chicken, they became the number one reseller of chicken. When Stahls’ put custom transfers on the menu, another unbeatable combination was born. Tim and Ted agreed to develop a marketing relationship, in which Weaver Screenprint would concentrate on providing the custom transfers and Stahls’ would promote the product to the imprinted sportswear industry.

THE BIRTH OF STAHL’S TRANSFER EXPRESS

The relationship worked so well that Weaver Screen Print, Inc. and Stahls’ Inc. decided to join forces and create a new company. With Tim at the helm as president, the new company began operating as Transfer Express, Inc., doing business as Stahls’ Transfer Express in December 1990.

THE MARKETING FORMULA

Part of the successful marketing efforts included the further expansion and updating of the Idea Book and a huge direct mail and advertising campaign that revolved around the publication of a how-to booklet entitled *The Art of Applying Transfers*. “*The Art of Applying Transfers* addressed many issues that were important to our customers,” says Ted Stahl. “We published over 160,000 copies of that booklet. It provided our customers with useful information on applying transfers, using heat presses and much more.”

EFFICIENCY PLUS

MARKET UNDERSTANDING

By expanding Weaver’s “production systems,” and tapping into Stahls’ customer base, Stahls’ Transfer Express quickly became the leading custom transfer manufacturer in the



The Art of Applying Transfers was part of the marketing formula used to gather leads and grow the customer base for Transfer Express

industry. Tim’s ability and desire to continually improve and perfect the custom transfer manufacturing process has driven the operational success of the business. Over the past several years, he led an effort to reduce the 45 step manufacturing process to a 19 step process. He is the first to admit he didn’t do it alone. “The company is built on my father’s idea that there’s a need for quality custom printing,” mentions Tim. In following this simple vision, the company has grown from a 1,000 square foot building with three employees to a 63,000 square foot building and over 100 employees.

TRANSFER EXPRESS TEAM

One of Tim’s proudest accomplishments is the assembling of his team. “It’s a wonderful group of people,” says Tim. The Transfer Express team is a group of dedicated individuals residing primarily in Mentor and surrounding Lake County communities. For three of the last four years, Transfer Express was listed in the NorthCoast 99 as one of the best places to work in *continued on page 4*



MENTOR, OHIO As the largest manufacturer of custom transfers in the world, Transfer Express, Inc. currently employs over 100 energetic, reliable, and conscientious team members. This team provides a competitive edge to dealers of imprinted sportswear by producing imprinted garment graphics faster and with greater accuracy than the competition.

On Demand Printing:
A Concept that Works
Worldwide

focus: JAPAN

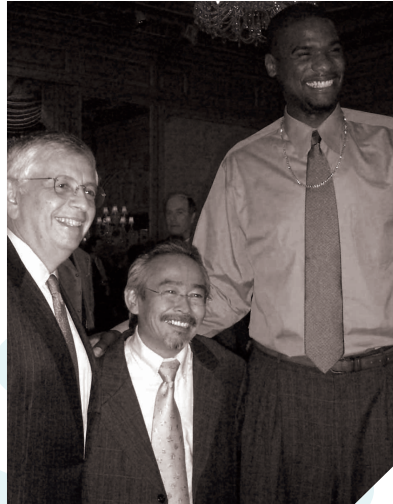
Stahls' Shines at Japan's NBA Games

Just as Stahls St. Clair Shores has provided on-site garment manufacturing at the last four NBA All Star Games in the U.S., Mr Kamada of Stahls Japan has implemented a similar program at the NBA Japan Games.

SOLUTIONS PAPERS TO THE RESCUE

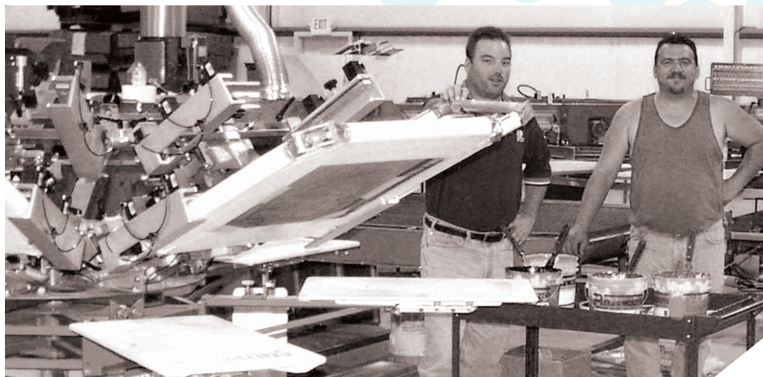
For the past several years, he has provided replica jerseys to fans at the stadium using CAD-materials. This year, he used Solutions Papers to print and cut the numbers for a more exact color match. "I have been providing on-site replica jersey services since 1999," says Mr. Kamada. A licensed supplier of NBA merchandise in Japan, Mr Kamada is the sole merchandiser supplying replica jerseys at Japan Games. "No one else can keep up," says Kamada.

Mr. Kamada is president and founder of Terumi Enterprises, also known as Stahls Japan and has been a distributor of Stahls products since 1995. His facility is located in Kagawa, Japan. You can visit his website at www.trnet.com •



above: Mr. Kamada shows off one of the replica jerseys he produced using Solutions paper on-site at the 2003 NBA Japan Games. left: NBA Commissioners David Stern, Mr. Kamada and Seattle Supersonic center Jerome James at the post game press conference.

Stahls' Hotronix Grows to Meet Customer Demands



Ben Robinson, Director of Operations (l) and Denny Helmick (r), Screen Print Manager

In January 2004, Stahls' Hotronix in Masontown, Pennsylvania, finished construction on an additional 30,000 square feet of warehouse and production space. This new addition houses the shipping department, and offers increased garment warehousing for their Decorating Technologies Division. It's also home to their new screen printing production department. "With this new expansion, we're able to better meet the decorating needs of our customers," says Ben Robinson, Director of Operations. Improvements include:

- Ability to warehouse 100,000 additional garments
- 20 station, 8-color auto screen print machine with electric print heads capable of printing up to 400 tees per hour
- 10-color manual sample press
- Automatic screen coater to assure consistent printing
- Curing dryer
- Exposure unit
- Screen exposure system
- Screen reclaiming system



Ted Stahl on Building Blocks

> In case you are wondering what perpetually drives me to continue to develop and grow a united group of Stahls' companies, I have asked myself the same question and have boiled it down to the following:

1) This company was founded on a pioneering philosophy. I find great satisfaction in being part one of the pioneers of the imprinted sportswear industry and wish to continue this legacy. From the time the company first created a thermal adhesive over 40 years ago to the introduction of Thermo-FILM, CAD Materials, Hotronix and other innovative products and services, we have built a worldwide reputation by designing helpful new products. It is my wish to maintain our image as an innovator and pioneer of personalization technology.

2) This company was once known for its bold, aggressive marketing and subsequent education of our customers. It is my desire to see us maintain and rebuild that image to the benefit of both our dealers and our staff.

3) It is a huge joy for me to see people who work with Groupe Stahl companies evolve and grow to reach their full potential. My role in helping people meet and exceed their career expectations, as mentor, coach, advisor, friend, has brought me an immeasurable amount of fulfillment and happiness. I wish that to continue.

GROUPE STAHL
BUILDING
 blocks

- 1** Pioneering Philosophy
- 2** Aggressive Marketing and Customer Education
- 3** Joy in Helping People Reach their Potential
- 4** Sharing Knowledge that leads to Success

4) Last but not least, the pleasure that comes from sharing the knowledge and experience I have gained over the years with customers is something that also brings great joy. It never ceases to amaze me how good it feels to show someone a faster, better way to personalize a shirt. To see a customers face when they see how easy it is to use a transfer, or cut a player name. We are not saving the world here. But if we do our jobs right, we know we are contributing to the financial success of others. Helping just one customer save time and money can have positive ripple effects that reach out farther than we will ever know. •

Northeastern Ohio. What makes it such a special place to work? "Talented people with a great blend of personalities," says Tim. And he adds, "We have fun." Annual design competitions, awards for perfect attendance, and a successful product line are just some of the ingredients that add up to a low .03% employee turnover rate in the past 5 years.

THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

"We're a team that plays to win, whether we're introducing a new product, following a marketing plan or making it easier for our customers to do business with us. It's not brain surgery, but we have to perform. We know that people have to run their businesses with our products, but in the end it's just a t-shirt. Keeping things in perspective helps."



Transfer Express Update
Since this article was written, we have welcomed Bernie Sikon as the new president of Transfer Express. We look forward to the continued success of the company that Tim was instrumental in building.

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

"Our success is also due to our ability to focus on one specific niche," continues Tim. The company has been guided by the results of two strategic planning sessions, one which took place in 1997 and a recent one in December 2003. "These planning sessions provide us with guideposts for tracking our efforts and help set milestones for the future. These include new product development and new marketing strategies. But the main thing the sessions have taught us is the importance of remembering who our customers are and what made us successful. Our continued focus on the fast and consistent delivery of custom transfers is what will keep us on the road to further growth and success." •