

# Harvest *Magazine*

*a quarterly journal on true wealth building and sharing*  
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## The Wealth of Work

The Columbus Sign Company and  
the William A. Hoy Family...Together for 100 Years!



*William A. Hoy between sons Mike (left) and Bill (right) in front of their family business.*

## The Wealth of Work

*Editor's Note: We continue this year's cover series on local families and their businesses. Long time clients and friends, William A. Hoy and sons, Bill and Mike Hoy, are owners of The Columbus Sign Company. It is our privilege to share a bit of the history and legacy of this very special family and the business that has been a part of that family for 100 years and four generations.*

### A Family's Passion...100 Years of Making Signs

When Art Hoy joined the fledgling Columbus Sign Company in 1911, little did he know that one hundred years later his great grandsons would be preparing to lead the company into its second century. His story is the quintessential story of the American Dream at the turn of the twentieth century – the craftsman who eventually becomes a business owner and who starts a family legacy that has left its mark literally on the buildings and doors of central Ohio for 100 years.

According to Art's son, Bill, (William A. Hoy, now 88 and retired president of Columbus Sign), Art's expertise was gold leaf lettering, a tedious task that required great skill and patience. Then company owners, Fred Schenck and Herb Moessner, knew they had a rare gift in Art. They reserved him for only the most intricate jobs, with the rest of their workforce handling the regular "wall jobs" – painting the name of a business on the wall of its building, the most typical form of advertising at that time. Lumber and concrete companies were staples for the Columbus Sign Company, as were the numerous state fairs that took place all over Ohio in those years.

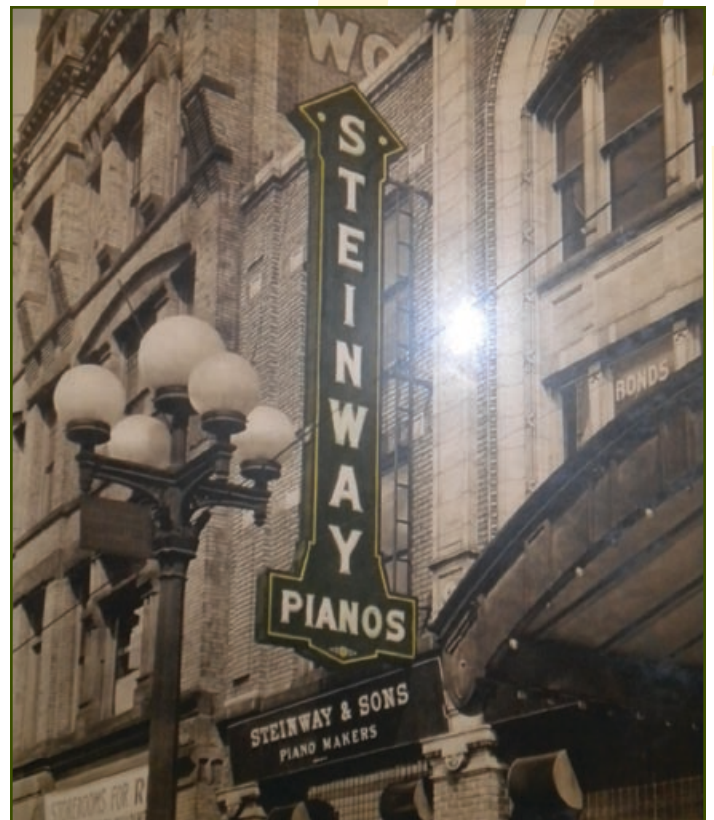
The company weathered the market crash of '29 and the ensuing Great Depression, but it wasn't easy. Bill contemplated joining the company right after graduating from East High School in 1940, but decided instead to join the chemical lab of the Bonnie-Floyd Casting Company, managed by the older brother of his girlfriend, Betty King. Bill and Betty had fallen in love in junior high school and when she graduated in 1940 from South High School, they knew it was only a matter of time before they would marry. Betty was the daughter of Roy King, Franklin County Clerk of Courts, and her family was related to John Bricker, the well known governor and later U.S. Senator. Bill remembers attending many a Bricker Family reunion in Mt. Sterling and even recalls driving Bricker friend and business magnate, John Galbreath, in a Columbus Day Parade.

A call up to the U.S. Army in 1943 was just what Bill needed to move forward with marrying his beloved Betty. Off they went to Georgia for basic training and then on to Camp Reynolds, where a military request for sign making kept Bill busy at that base for

nearly two years. He remembers his most intricate job was a custom made replica of the Declaration of Independence for a July 4th celebration.

In 1945 he was placed into the medic corps. He and Betty moved to Ft. Lewis in Washington state, driving there in a '36 Plymouth (Bill has had a lifelong love affair with the automobile, as evidenced by his antique car collection). While he worked on base, Betty took a job at the state capitol in nearby Tacoma.

Bill shipped out to France in 1945 and soon found himself in Paris celebrating V-Day, which he described as three NYC New Year's Day celebrations combined into one! From there it was on to Marseilles for a brief stint and then over to Nagasaki to assist with the recovery effort after the dropping of the atomic bomb. Bill shared a amusing memory of sitting in a barber chair in downtown Nagasaki, the barbershop itself in



*Steinway Pianos' sign, downtown Columbus, 1930s*

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*Marinello Beauty School and Clinic signs, downtown Columbus, 1930s*

ruins, looking up at a Japanese barber holding a very sharp razor..."I wonder if I'll get out of this chair alive," Bill thought to himself. By the way, Bill believes he is one of only a handful of U.S. soldiers to have served in both the Pacific and Atlantic in only a three month time span.

With Bill's military service complete, he and Betty returned to Columbus in 1946 and he decided to join his dad, Art, at the Columbus Sign Company. Co-owner Fred Schenck had died several years earlier and in 1949 Art bought half of the business from Herb Moessner. Four years later, son Bill was admitted as a part owner.

Like his dad, Bill was a gold leaf craftsman. He recalled the many hours they spent doing all the gold lettering on the doors of every office suite in the LeVeque Tower, as well as the Atlas and Beggs Buildings. Whenever F&R Lazarus changed store hours, Bill and Art would be sent out on a Sunday morning to change the store times painted on all the external doors. Since lettering was done by hand on the inside of each door, it had to be done backwards in order to read correctly!

The company's growth exploded in the postwar 40s and 50s. Bill recalled the numerous companies they did jobs for: Huntington National Bank, Ohio National Bank, the Dobbs Restaurant at Port Columbus and the Western Electric plant in east Columbus. For Western Electric, Columbus Sign hung an annual Season's Greetings sign on the building front with a huge wreath located above the main entrance. Western Electric had a unique advertising approach and asked Columbus Sign to put a Season's Greetings sign on the roof so planes flying to and from nearby Port Columbus Airport would be reminded of Western Electric's presence in central Ohio. For the Ohio Farm Bureau, Columbus

Sign would prepare the entire stage for their annual company meetings at the downtown Neil House.

Columbus Sign Company's location changed several times through the decades. Early on they were located in an alley next to the Ohio Theatre. In the early 30s they moved briefly to 39 W. State Street and then to Third Street. In the 40s and 50s the company occupied space at 320 E. Main Street, near what is now Grant Hospital. But with urban renewal in the 50s and 60s, the company was forced to relocate and purchased its current location at 1515 E. Fifth Ave., a growing industrial gateway at that time.

By now, Bill had bought out Herb Moessner and Bill and Betty's sons, Bill and Mike, were beginning to show an interest in the company. Mike came in first, initially at 16 to help his father with a big interior and exterior sign job at the Lancaster Hocking Glass Company. He showed a natural gift for design and drafting (Bill brags that Mike was able to read detailed blueprints even as a teenager). Mike graduated from Walnut Ridge High School in '71 and went to OSU for a year before joining the company full time in '73. Sadly, grandfather Art died in 1974; for only a brief period there were three generations of Hoy men working in the business.

Son Bill's entrance into the business was a bit more circuitous. He too worked in the business as a teen, remembering summers spent doing a lot of sign painting and installing Master Card and Visa Card signs on glass doors of gas stations and convenience stores throughout Columbus. After graduating from Eastmoor High School in '67, he went on to Ohio Wesleyan University and OSU, graduating first in the computer science department at OSU in '71. He worked for the university while obtaining his MPA, interning with the



*Block O of Life, Woody Hayes Athletic Facility, OSU Campus, Columbus*



*Other recent work in progress*

City of Columbus' Department of Finance. Preparing the budgets for a number of city departments, Bill was a natural to become the first Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation under Mel Dodge, when those two departments were combined in '72.

By 1982, Bill was ready to leave public service and join brother Mike, who greatly wanted his brother's business expertise on hand as dad Bill began to decrease his time in the business. And the brothers knew they would work well together – several years earlier they began acquiring real estate together and owned and operated a three store Ink Well franchise.

With the boys on board, the company began growing again. Expanding the company's capabilities into metal and plastic broadened the type of business the company could handle. When Mike completed a rush job lettering "OSU" and "BUCKEYES" at each end of the new astroturf field at OSU Stadium in the mid 70s, in time for that season's first home game, the company began a relationship with the OSU Athletics Department that continues to this day. Check out the internal and external signage at virtually any of the OSU sports complexes on the university's main campus and you will find the work of the Columbus Sign Company. Perhaps most impressive is the signage done for the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. Throughout the complex, the rich tradition that is OSU football is told in displays and exhibits, all done by the Columbus Sign Company.

Recent decades have included work for local hospitals, the State Capitol Building, all the downtown theatres (Ohio, Lincoln, Palace and Southern) and a wide range of retail establishments, law firms and houses of worship. Restaurants also are a specialty; the company handles all signage for the Cameron Mitchell family of restaurants.

Computers have long replaced the hand lettering done in earlier decades, but the same focus on innovative design, outstanding construction and installation, and great customer service has kept the Columbus Sign Company a leader in the local sign industry.

Son Bill now serves as CEO and manages the business, while Mike serves as President and handles sales and product design. And now the fourth generation of Hoys has joined the business – Mike's sons, David and Eric. David, 31, attended Davis & Elkins as well as Ohio Dominican and serves as VP for Production and Scheduling. Eric, 30, is an Ashland University graduate and serves as VP for Sales and Operations. Together these four Hoy men are a formidable team!

When the three older Hoy men were asked what were the keys to remaining in business for 100 years, the elder Bill quickly mentioned that the business always has been managed from the perspective of 'the best solution for the customer at a price they can afford'. And he added that virtually every customer sees Columbus Sign as a "partner" – a company they've worked with in the past and can turn to again with confidence. Mike added that the company really tries to put itself in the shoes of the customer – 'what are they trying to accomplish and what design will best meet their needs'? That extra consulting and advice is uncommon in the industry and is highly valued.

And son Bill added that the company has built a long tradition of treating employees and customers as a family with trust and respect in good times and in challenging times.

Sounds like a great recipe for all businesses – perhaps we can find a company that will make a sign with those words of wisdom.



*Betty and Bill Hoy with their 1955 Ford Fairlane Victoria*