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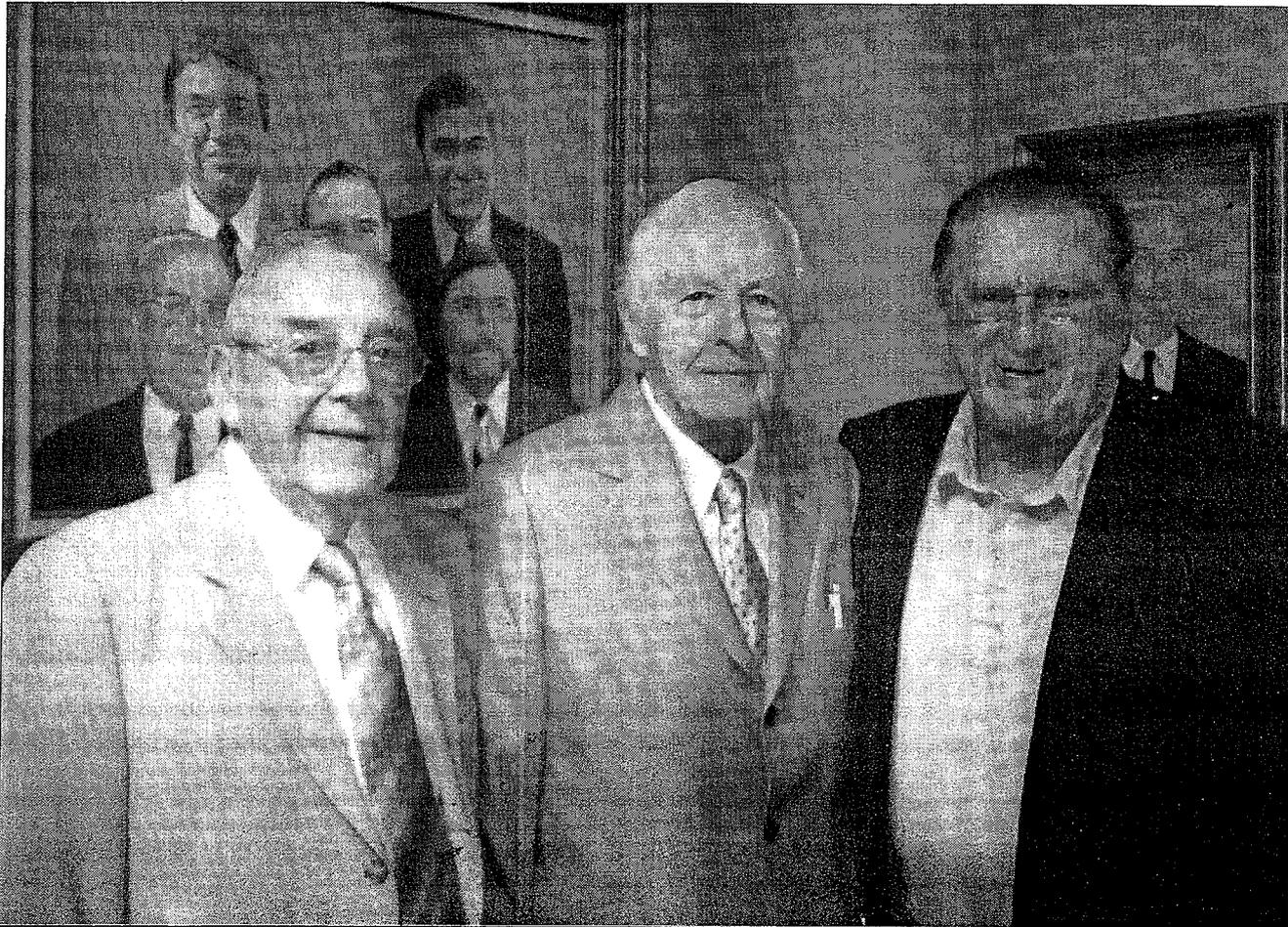
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Hard work helps keep Mansfield Paper trio youthful



Bob Giaquinto, Arthur Lutz and Vinny Ciancotti have worked at Mansfield Paper on Union Street for six decades, helping to establish the local company as a leader in paper products while forging friendships and inspiring generations of coworkers.

If the fountain of youth does exist, Bob Giaquinto, Arthur Lutz and Vinny Ciancotti have certainly discovered its secret location. While their peers are relishing their retirement and living a well deserved life of leisure, this spunky trio is still working the 9-5 grind as Mansfield Papers top salesmen. At the ripe ages of 93, 88, and 80 respectively, these spirited gentlemen have held their coveted sales position at the West Springfield paper establishment for over

By Maureen Gazda
Special to the WS RECORD

sixty years, and when asked if they plan on embarking on that permanent vacation known as retirement anytime soon, they scoff at the notion.

“Retiring?” Mr. Ciancotti quips. “When I get up in the morning what am I going to do? This isn’t just a job; it’s my family, my passion, my life. I am not going to stop doing what I love, am I?”

As lifelong coworkers and more importantly, friends, these gentlemen are the heart and soul of the still-thriving paper company and an integral part of the establishment's rich history.

“We are the old dogs here; we’ve been here since the very beginning. The only and best job I’ve ever had,” Mr. Giaquinto explains.

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Mansfield trio

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Post-war beginnings

When the Shapiro brothers started Mansfield Paper in 1946, they were looking for eager young men to help the company flourish in the post-World War II era. All three men attended American International College and Mr. Lutz was the first to join the then-Springfield company in 1949, followed by Mr. Giaquinto in 1951, and Mr. Ciancotti in 1953. From working countless hours in the warehouse to driving the trucks, they were among the original core group of workers who helped transform the company into the viable enterprise it has been all these years. Scott Parent, who has been with the company for 36 years and has been president since 1996, says that it was their creativity that helped form the foundation for the company's prosperous future.

"These three gentlemen, they helped build this company with their tireless effort and made it what it is today," he says. "They are the embodiment of what this company represents. We are not only surviving but thriving because of the values of hard work they instilled. They are priceless to us."

The hard work ethic the three salesmen epitomize seemed to be evident from their very first day on the job, when, as salesmen in the early stages of their career, they would walk from house to house, mile upon mile, to secure just a few sales.

"We were lucky if we got five sales back then," Mr. Lutz explains.

It was this persistence that allowed them to become experts in their field. As Mr. Ciancotti points out, it was during this time that he and his colleagues persevered through challenge and rejection

and learned the vital skills that would shape the rest of their successful careers.

"We worked for what we wanted and the struggles and challenges we encountered along the way only added to our character and made us better at our jobs," he says.

As members of the so-called Greatest Generation they were engrained with the philosophy that with hard work, optimism, and persistence one could achieve the goals they set for themselves.

"Many years ago," Mr. Ciancotti declares, "I called a potential client every Friday afternoon for three years before I received any reply. Many would say, 'that's crazy,' but I wanted that client to know I was a go-getter and I knew eventually that my perseverance would pay off. To this day, they are one of my closest clients."

Mansfield Paper has been located at 380 Union St. since the late-1960s. Today, according to the company, it operates a 130,000 square-foot distribution facility and is the oldest and largest distributor of food service disposables, packaging supplies, maintenance and janitorial items, and other related products in Western Massachusetts and northern Connecticut, and also ships to markets across the country.

Trio maintains valued skills

As Mr. Parent notes, the trio's go-getter attitude is still on display every day and they are revered as superstar salesmen.

"They haven't lost their touch," he says. "This isn't just their livelihood. These men are extremely productive and add value to the company and their customers. Their sense of responsibility to their company and customers is unmatched."

Choosing to spend their golden years

behind a desk instead of in retirement showcases the dedication these men have for their job and their company. A dedication that Mr. Parent attributes to a deep sense of purpose that was engrained in them.

"These men don't give up," he claims. "Through sickness, ailment, and challenge they persevere through it all."

For Mr. Parent, who started working in the company's Party World store as a teenager, their relationship goes beyond that of just regular coworkers: they are his idols.

"I grew up learning from these guys," he explains. "They have been my mentors, my teachers. The amount of wisdom and expertise I gained from watching these incredible men is invaluable."

And Messrs. Giaquinto, Lutz, and Ciancotti still teach and inspire him on a daily basis.

"When they come into my office for a quick chat, my day is immediately brightened," Mr. Parent says.

And it's not just their hard work ethic that inspires him. As a family-owned company, the camaraderie and family atmosphere they helped instill has always been the cornerstone of the company's ethos.

"In addition to maintaining a motto of diligence and hard work, Mansfield has always been a company with rich family values and a close family atmosphere," Mr. Parent says. "These men were instrumental in enforcing the strong family bond that is still in existence today. We are a tight-knit group."

Influence felt by co-workers

Along with Mr. Parent, the gentlemen have left a lasting impression on the generations of Mansfield workers that have come after them. As pioneers of the company, their expertise has influenced

many of the company's 80 employees.

Upon stepping through Mansfield's front door, it is evident that staff members enjoy the presence as the salesmen. Mentioning their names sparks an immediate smile on their faces.

"They are my role models," says Bill Welz, who has been a salesman for more than 20 years. "They set the standard for the paper distribution industry for total professionalism. Hard work, perseverance, and service to the customers is their creed."

David Matlasz, another 20 year-plus veteran, echoes this sentiment. "I learned by their example to just go out and put in a hard day's work. The stories they relate and the advice they give has always been encouraging."

Liz Imbriglio, who has served as Mr. Parent's executive assistant for the past 17 years, acknowledges that they are a rare breed whose passion and devotion to their work will never fade.

"That generation doesn't quit," she states. "I have never met a harder working group of men in my life."

It's that diligent work ethic that they hope to pass on to the young generation entering the workforce.

Mr. Ciancotti states emphatically, "Nothing, nothing, nothing beats hard work. There is no such thing as an overnight success. If you want something you have to be willing to pay the price of time and effort to be successful."

Mr. Giaquinto echoes this sentiment, "You can't have everything handed to you, you have to work hard to earn it."

The salesmen advise that fear of rejection should not interfere with pursuing one's true passion: "You have to be a go-getter. You can't be afraid of rejection and you have to keep at something to prove that you can do it," Mr. Lutz declares.

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Salesmen help establish company

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Retirement? Not likely

As for the future, this energetic trio has no immediate plans of slowing down. After more than six decades in the business they credit their longevity in the workforce as the solitary reason for maintaining their boyish good looks and youthful spirit. "Many people say they can't wait to retire when they're 65," Mr. Lutz says. "I say why? I feel younger than I did when I was 60 and I know it's because I love going to work every day."

As Ms. Imbriglio points out, their still-boundless energy and zest for life is contagious and reverberates throughout the office on a daily basis.

"I can't help feeling happy and energized when they are around," she says. "They make me laugh and their positive attitude is infectious."

Mr. Parent posits that working has played a definite role in turning back the hands of time for the salesmen. "I am always astounded when I am reminded of their age because I tend to forget they are of a certain age bracket. The energy and youthfulness they exude lends itself to that of a young man."

But they never forget how lucky they are to still be making a viable contribution to the workforce. Mr. Giaquinto points out that they savor the opportunity to still be blessed with the ability to continue working and the amount of joy they still receive from their job.

"We are lucky guys to still be doing what we love at our age and we don't take that for granted," he says.

In an era where people change jobs and even careers six or seven times, the modest gentlemen are proud to have worked at the same company for more than half a century. Always down playing

the accolades they have brought the company and the influence they have had on its workers and clients, they instead choose to pay-gratitude to the company they call family.

"Along with our customers, it's our Mansfield family that is a constant source of motivation and inspiration to us," Mr. Ciancotti says.

And of course they don't forget each other. They have spent their lives as consummate professionals and desk buddies but the personal friendship they have forged transcends the professional relationship that first brought them together.

"These guys are my brothers," Mr. Ciancotti says.

They have been through life's trial and tribulations together and have celebrated momentous milestones together. As Mr. Lutz puts it, he wouldn't have it any other way.

"They are my coworkers but more importantly they are my friends. I couldn't ask for two better friends," he says.

Years ago, co-founder Irving Shapiro once likened Mansfield Paper to that of a duck swimming in a pond. "Although a duck looks smooth and serene on the surface," he said, "it is powered by strong, fast webbed feet under the water. The same goes for Mansfield Paper, the diligent hard work that we put forth creates a smooth, seamless service to our clients."

In its 66-year existence, it's safe to say that Bob Giaquinto, Arthur Lutz, and Vinny Ciancotti are still the powerful force behind Mansfield's webbed feet and it doesn't look like they'll be coming to the surface anytime soon.

