Sweet success

Hard work and imagination go a long way for three BSU alumni

There are **no** limits to the parties Paula Forney throws.   Photo by Chuck Scheer

Making money from making merry

By Bob Evancho

Wanna party? Paula Forney can help you if you do. Forney is the co-owner of Events Unlimited, a 10-month-old Boise business that will do all or part of your party planning. So the next time you're preparing to host that festive social event, remember: Boise has a party pro who can make your soiree special.

Actually, when Forney and her partner, Patty Goodson, decided to start their own business, they weren't sure what form it would take. "The important thing," Forney recalls, "was that it had to be convenient so I could work around my schedule with my family."

And with Events Unlimited, Forney enjoys the best of both worlds: a niche in the Boise market and a business that doesn't demand all of her time. "That's why I enjoy it so much. I have two kids and Patty has three, and we can fit the business around them," she says.

Three years ago, however, Forney wanted to stay home with her children, who are now 5 and 3. After working for seven and a half years in Sen. Jim McClure's Boise office, Forney decided to "retire," stay at home, and devote her time to her kids.

But after two years Forney, who graduated from Boise State in 1977 with a degree in secondary education, decided full-time domesticity "wasn't as fulfilling," as she had hoped; hence the formation of Events Unlimited.

"We've done a variety of things with the business," Forney says. "We did a wedding from start to finish and we've been hired to act as consultants, giving ideas on how to do a party. Every event we've done differently."

Events Unlimited's total involvement is just that. Forney and Goodson will write invitations, decorate, hire caterers and florists, rent halls and equipment, and perform other party-giving duties if that's what their clients want. The events they have worked have included private dinner parties, large corporate gatherings, and political campaign banquets.

Forney, who is the current secretary of the BSU Alumni Association, believes Events Unlimited is becoming a solid member of the Boise business community with a growing reputation. "There's definitely a need for this type of service," she comments. "There's a market for what we're doing."

Ben Heidemann's custom farming business is no small potatoes.

Hard work brings green harvest

By Larry Burke

"See this! This is my baby . . . this is where it all started!" exclaims Ben Heidemann as he points with obvious affection toward the old Freeman hay baler.

Heidemann's been riding high ever since he climbed on the $13,000 baler in 1971. Today, he operates one of—if not *the*—largest custom farming operations in the country from his sprawling headquarters near Kimberly.

His fleet has grown to 130 pieces of equipment, a $3 million inventory ranging from the old Freeman to state-of-the-art corn choppers and fertilizer trucks.

The key to that success, he says, is to provide services that farmers need and do the work better and cheaper than anyone else.

"We do it all . . . and we do it how they want it when they want it," he says. Diversity is important. Heidemann is the only one in the region who can bale, stack and swathe hay; green chop hay and corn; haul pellets and beet pulp; haul grain; plow; and fertilize.

For the 1971 Boise State graduate, farming has become a big, big business. At peak season, he runs a 32-man crew on as many as six jobs at a time. He works for 350 clients, many of them dairy farmers in the Magic Valley. His annual overhead runs as much as $700,000, $250,000 of that just in replacement parts for the equipment.

When he started, Heidemann said his goal was to be worth $250,000 by age 35. He's long surpassed that. "Actually I'm a poor man because all the profits go back into the business," he laughs.

For all his present success, Heidemann was no overnight sensation. It has taken years of careful management and planning to get to where he is today.

Education, he says, played a key role. He knew he wanted to be in agriculture after spending boyhood summers on his grandparents' farm. But rather than study agriculture, he came to Boise State to learn how to run a business.

The lessons took. He still quotes principles taught by professors like his mentor Wayne White, Dale Blickenstaff, John Mitchell and Ellis Lamborn.

"Everything they said was right—be goal oriented, use good accounting practices, be diversified, be competitive," he says. "Everyone has an idea of how to make money. But today you need education to make it work. I wouldn't be as successful as I am without those professors at Boise State."

But there is one other important ingredient in Heidemann's formula for success—work, very hard work.

This fall was typical. By mid-October Heidemann and his crews could finally take a Sunday off after working 13-hour days in the corn since mid-August. In 16 years, he's taken two vacations; even though he owns a farm himself, he's never had time to work it.

Heidemann has built his custom operation despite the depressed farm economy.

"I've seen people in this business going along just fine and suddenly go under. That's not going to happen to me. Do I worry? You bet . . . I sit up straight in bed sometimes worrying about it," he says. "For a few it comes easy, but 99.9 percent of the time you have to start at the bottom and earn what you get. I've paid the price . . . and I'm still not there yet," he says.

"But," he laughs, "I don't know what I'd do with myself if I didn't have six or seven projects going at once." □

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These dogs like their new togs, invented and marketed by BSU alums Roger Nelson, right, and Darrel Hammon, left.

Photo by Chuck Scheer

Dogtogs send pooches packing

By Dan Gallagher

A "dog's life" is supposed to represent a sorrowful existence, but dogs actually spend most of their time playing or sleeping.

"Dogtogs," an invention of Boise State University alums Darrel Hammon and Roger Nelson, now let Fido carry his own weight.

Dogtogs are several pet-related devices in one, including dog saddlebags to let the family dog pack his own food, a wallet, rain gear, shotgun shells or just about anything.

The Dogtogs start with a conventional dog harness made of nylon webbing which fits around the dog's chest. At the end of the harness strap is a loop which can be fitted through a seatbelt and cinched down to secure the dog against an accident or quick stop.

The bags come in six colors, from hot pink or purple to hunter orange or camouflage. They are produced in five different sizes and sold under the Pet Futures Inc. name.

Inventing Dogtogs was only the beginning of bringing the product to the public. Hammon, a junior high school English teacher who earned his degree from Boise State in 1982 and a master's in English in 1986, and Nelson, who attended Boise Junior College and played football, had the desire but needed some technical advice.

The Idaho Small Business Development Center at Boise State came through with much of that information, helping the two establish a business plan and look at the product's marketing strengths, Hammon said.

The Dogtogs seemed like a good item to Hammon and Nelson, but they weren't certain how consumers would accept them. Mark Denton of Mark, Inc. of Boise allayed their fears by test marketing the device with 14 people around the Treasure Valley. Out of a 100 percent acceptance, the test subjects rated them 90 percent.

"One guy at the Streets for People festival in Boise saw our dog with camouflage bags and said 'Look at the Rambo dog,' " Nelson said. Friends in Alaska use one on their pooch to backpack and are able to carry about 70 extra pounds, he said.

"We wanted to make something fun," Hammon said. "This is fun." □

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