

# Two lucky beats lead to success

**D**o you remember The Hardy Boys detective books? These books were read by grade-school boys for the thrill of adventure and escape. Kevin McEneely read them for the same reasons, but they were really training manuals for his detective agency, The Suburban Street Beat.

At the ripe old age of 10, Kevin and his partner were passing their business cards to friends and neighbors who may have been in need of investigations of lost bicycles. This didn't produce much income, so Kevin spent the rest of his grade school years working odd jobs that brought in a bit more revenue.

By the time he reached high school, he went for the big bucks in construction. He interviewed with many foremen, but just couldn't land the job. This is where Kevin's father stepped in and taught him how to dress for success. He told him he'd never be hired if he showed up at the construction site at 10 in the morning dressed in madras shirts and penny loafers. Kevin's father told him to go and buy some work shoes, muddy them up, arrive early in the morning and tell the foreman he was ready to work. It worked. The rest of Kevin's high school summers were spent working construction.

After high school graduation, Kevin was off to St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa. Naturally, Kevin planned on attending this school for four years, but this plan was almost cut short when he was nearly expelled. The previous sin was having a beer party in the dorm, but even worse...girls were present.

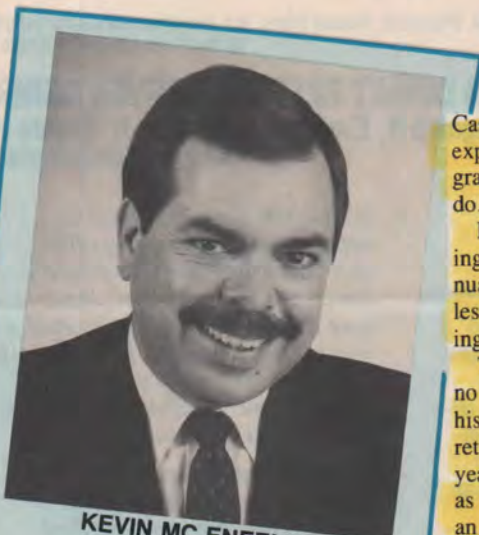
With a bit of Irish luck and the generosity of the dean of men, Kevin was given a second chance. This near disaster snapped the little rowdy into becoming a serious student.

Kevin became a member of the student council, president of the business fraternity and was selected for the "Who's Who in America Colleges and Universities." He graduated in 1970 with a degree in business administration.



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**KEVIN MC ENEELY**

### Synopsis of Résumé

- Career Goal Age Five:** Still undecided
- Career Goal Age 21:** To own his own business
- Current Occupation:** Executive vice president **Nightingale Conant**
- Personal Business Heroes:** Donald Trump, Armand Hammer
- Hobbies:** Collecting real estate (he owns four homes on one block)

Career decision time approached and the opportunities for business majors were not all that attractive. The jobs available were either in sales or banking. Neither appealed to him, so he returned to construction work in the interim.

His father returned to the scene and passed Kevin's résumé out to all of his friends — something Kevin fought. As the story goes, Mr. McEneely made a lucky pass — he sent Kevin's résumé to the executive vice president of Banker's Life & Casualty.

The next step was an interview with the director of personnel, a very patient person. Kevin was first asked what he thought of actuarial work. Kevin asked what it was, and the man described it. Kevin didn't think he was interested. Next, he was asked about claims. What's that? It was explained, and the answer was no. Sales? No. Nothing clicked.

As Kevin was about to leave, he was told that there was a direct marketing division in Northbrook that comprised an advertising agency, lettershop and a printing company. This sparked his interest.

A call was made to Louise Stawasz, then head of lead acquisition for Banker's Life &

Casualty. She interviewed Kevin and explained that they never hired new college graduates but she would see what she could do.

Kevin wanted to be part of direct marketing. Everything felt right, except for the annual compensation of \$7,200. He wanted no less than \$7,800 but was considering becoming flexible, realizing all he could learn.

There were two more interviews and still no offer. While in limbo, Kevin went off to his honeymoon. He phoned Louise upon his return and was made an offer of \$7,200 per year. He accepted and started the next day as a marketing analyst, tabulating leads on an adding machine.

Louise was a tough boss, but the fundamentals he learned from her are invaluable.

After three years, Kevin was told he was to begin working with Rod McArthur on special projects. This was something he really didn't want to do, knowing Rod's demanding and erratic behavior, but Kevin weighed the alternatives and didn't see many.

Rod was extremely difficult. Kevin couldn't believe the ridiculous idea Rod came up with...collectible plates! But, Rod went ahead with the launch, despite Kevin's opinion.

The Bradford Exchange was launched in 1973. By 1975, the volume of sales was \$5 million. Rod was the creative expert and Kevin's involvement included marketing, operations and finance.

He was working 12 demanding hours a day. On weekends, there were surprise visits from Rod, who whiled away the young family's hours talking business.

In 1975, Kevin was promoted to vice president and three years later, to executive vice president.

In 1978, Bradford reached \$20 million in sales, and they knew they had a winning continuity business.

Kevin's challenges were building an organization, and setting up a data processing department, a marketing department and a financial department. This was one of the most difficult and rewarding times of his life.

Domestic business was so successful that Kevin and Rod launched businesses in Canada, England and Germany. All were successful.

All was well for Kevin until his 12th year at the Bradford Exchange, when Rod McArthur died. Kevin was fired by the family the next day. **(continued on page 145)**



His real sadness was over the feeling of being taken away from his family at Bradford. His gladness was over the fact that the people he hired remained and were able to run one of the most successful and profitable direct marketing companies in the world, more than \$120 million in sales.

Because of the financial generosity of Rod's family, Kevin didn't panic. The first thing he did was take an office, still maintaining a business environment.

Each day, he would go to his office and try to plan a new business. He thought and he thought, and the results after two months were that there wasn't a business he wanted to start.

Next, he began interviewing companies, and his old feelings from when he first interviewed at Banker's returned. No, no, no. These jobs don't feel right.

Next, Kevin really began sorting out his interests. He'd always been a fan of motivational books and always applied these techniques to his business involvement. He thought maybe he should become acquainted with someone from Nightingale Conant, whose specialty is motivational tapes and videos.

Arriving at this decision, Kevin attended Chicago Direct Marketing Day. He was talking to a supplier, when by chance Vic Conant stopped to say hello to the man Kevin was talking to.

Vic and Kevin began talking and made an appointment to meet in the Nightingale Conant office. The Conants just happened to be looking for a strong direct marketer to help run the company. Next, Kevin met with Vic's father, Lloyd Conant, and was hired in an unusually short period of time.

More sadness: Shortly after Kevin started, Lloyd Conant passed away. Although it was a terrible shock, Kevin was grateful that he was there for Vic. Together they are running the company. Vic serves as president and CEO and Kevin as executive vice president.

These men are building another powerhouse. Nightingale Conant is the premier audio publisher in the world. It is going into foreign markets: Canada, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom.

There are a lot of positive changes in marketing strategies and personnel. They're expanding into sales and management programs.

Three years ago, there were 150 employees with \$25 million in sales. Today, there are 265 employees and \$50 million in sales.

A very large part of Kevin's success is



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attributed to his wife, who is always there for him and talks his problems away. It's a joy to see his Irish eyes light up when he talks about her.

Do you think it was a lucky omen that long ago Kevin chose the name Suburban Street Beat?

He's had two lucky beats...The Bradford Exchange and Nightingale Conant, both on suburban streets in Niles, Illinois. These beats have afforded him the opportunity to practically own a suburban street, at least four houses on one block! ■

*Need help in tracking down that elusive speech you heard at a convention several months ago. Chances are we have it on tape. Call our Audio/Visual department at (516)746-6700 and see if they can't help you!*

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