

Star Tribune

NEWSPAPER OF THE TWIN CITIES

Edina: A nice niche for fulfilling writers' dreams

Jenna Ross, Star Tribune

Milt Adams can -- and often does -- point to any one of the hundreds of books that line his office walls and rattle off most everything about it: What it says, why it's interesting, who wrote it and how it came to be.

"Look at this book," Adams said, grabbing a copy of "Dione" by Steven Accola. "It's just black-and-white pen-and-ink, but the lines continue and twist and turn into figures, people. This strange little book is just fascinating when you open it up."

Many are "little bitty" books. Others are "big important books." And all, in some way, are his.

At the age of 70, Adams founded Beaver's Pond Press, an Edina publishing company that offers selected authors the opportunity to self-publish. Almost 10 years later, the press has grown by most every measure -- in employees, authors, copies sold, awards won and reputation.

After a long, successful entrepreneurial career, Adams founded the company because he saw a need in the market. But now, at age 79, he's growing the company because it's what he feels he was meant to do -- help authors get published.

"If I'd written a book, which I haven't, you'd see that everything from there" -- he put his finger on the table to mark his childhood -- "to here, all the goods and the bads, have prepared me for what I'm doing today."

A love of books

Adams grew up in Minneapolis and graduated from the University of Minnesota, where he studied economics because, as he put it, "in those days you didn't get a liberal arts degree." But he minored in humanities and fell in love with books.

Most of Adams' career had nothing to do with them. He worked in the corporate world -- for firms such as Archer Daniels Midland, the Carlson Companies and General Housewares -- in sales and training. In 1970, he started Adams & Others, and his years since were dominated largely by entrepreneurial spirit and success.

Much of his work focused on marketing, printing and publishing services, and through those, he saw an unserved need: Writers, even those with well-crafted manuscripts, often couldn't get published by traditional publishing firms. And vanity presses didn't offer much more than a printing job.

Adams envisioned an in-between -- "as much professional expertise as you need and

as much control as you want." And Beaver's Pond was born.

"It's clear Beaver's Pond has worked really hard to help authors publish in a professional way," said Susan Walker, executive director of the Midwest Booksellers Association, "which is important if they're going to sell their books from a bookstore's shelves or from their own."

"Self-publishing can be anything from someone 'publishing' from their garage to making a well-written, good-looking book. My impression is that they're on the high end of that scale."

While "a vanity press has never seen a bad manuscript," Beaver's Pond only accepts one of every nine inquiries it gets, said Joe Moses, the company's executive editor and vice president.

Many Beaver's Pond authors publish repeatedly with the press. Some win regional awards. Some are first-time authors who come in without a manuscript but with an idea.

A feeling of control

Bob Showers came to Beaver's Pond with a collage on a big piece of poster board. In early 2006, the Bloomington resident decided to make his idea -- a big, beautiful book chronicling the history of the Minnesota North Star's hockey team -- a reality.

He researched about 50 local publishers, narrowed them to a handful and made some calls. Immediately upon meeting Adams and the Beaver's Pond staff, Showers knew he would be in good hands. But before signing on, he waited to hear from three more traditional publishing firms.

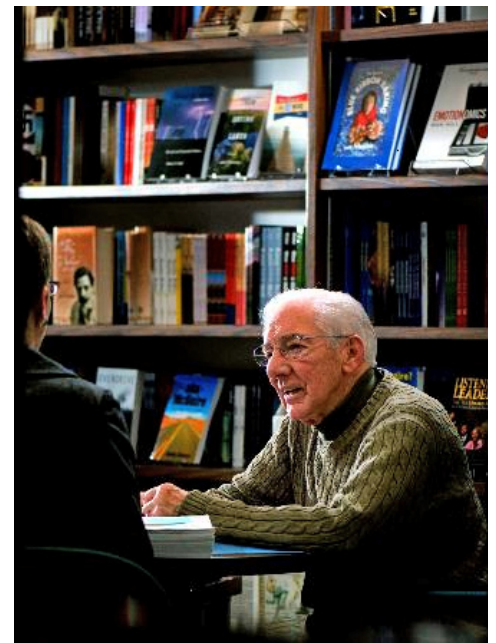
Within a week, he got his response: "Three brief, cold rejection letters, one that said, basically, 'We don't think this book will sell.'"

But it has. "Minnesota North Stars, History and Memories with Lou Nanne" debuted in October, and within a week, all 10,000 copies were gone. The book is now in its third printing.

Showers is pleased with, if not surprised, at the book's success. But he's more excited about the book itself.

"One of the things I had always feared, being naive about this, is that a publishing company would like the idea, agree to do the book, and I'd lose all control," he said.

In contrast, Showers influenced each step -- even design. The book's pages have the feel of the team's old media guides, just



as he imagined, and the cover "has that Minnesota North Stars brand."

Throughout his more than 18 months working with Beaver's Pond, Showers kept in constant contact with Adams.

"I was new at this and would start thinking about and worrying about things six, eight months down the road," Showers said. "Milt was good at counseling me in those moments. He made sure I stayed focused on what I had to do today and tomorrow."

"What I was meant to do"

Adams speaks so freely about his love for the business that he's often concerned about sounding corny, cheesy or sentimental. He often warns those listening that he's aware of it.

"It'll sound corny," Adams said about Showers, "but it was his dream that guided everything."

Or about his love for the job: "If someone took care of the mortgage and my car payments, I'd do it for free. No, I really would."

Or about his legacy: "I know how this sounds," Adams said, "but I know that Beaver's Pond is my purpose in life. It is what I was meant to do."

About two years ago, Adams decided to expand the company's staff and focus. Now, Beaver's Pond Group oversees four imprints with different focuses -- Beaver's Pond Press, Classroom Publishing, Adams Business and Professional and BookHouse Fulfillment.

Behind the expansion is Adams' hope that Beaver's Pond will live on long after he is gone.

"People have these fancy tombstones so people remember them," he said. "I don't need a tombstone. I have all these books."