

# Air-Traffic Controller Turned Distributor

It's 9:00 on a Wednesday night and Bryan Thompson's day is far from over. At arguably the busiest airport in the U.S., Thompson is working as an air traffic controller, nearly finished with his shift. About eight hours earlier, he arrived in the tower, after working all morning at his "day job." And he still has energy left to burn. "Usually, after work I go to the gym for a while," he says.

It was almost 30 years ago when Thompson enrolled in the United States Marine Corps. At the time, he was a professional photographer, but opted for a change. "The \$5,000 bonus helped convince me to sign up," Thompson admits.

While he came close to choosing a path as a pilot, he decided instead to pursue a different type of career in aviation. Before he left for boot camp, he had never been on an airplane. Today, after stops in places like Tennessee, South Carolina and Louisiana, Thompson works six days a week at O'Hare Airport in Chicago.

"Sometimes it's stressful, sure," he says. "I used to love getting up and going to work. I got paid well. More recently, things have changed a bit and it's more about procedures. But it's still a good challenge."

Thompson concedes he's looking forward to retirement. He actually has a retirement countdown clock ticking on his computer. With his future in mind, he's started to pour his heart into his promotional products business, Full Moon Rising Inc. (*asi/199736*). Along with two partners, who are also air traffic controllers, Thompson generates annual revenues of over \$400,000.

"We started as basically a non-profit," he says. "We would sell embroidered items at conventions for the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA). People wanted jackets, shirts, belt buckles and key tags."

While Thompson sold logoed products, he also made time to design the first-ever Web site for the NATCA. Plus, he served as an editor for the quarterly, 48-page union newsletter.

Thompson is also an avid musician. He plays the saxophone, trumpet and piano and recently bought an electric guitar. But he's not a guitar expert just yet. "I'm trying to find time to learn it," he says. Working through the office of



Bryan Thompson

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, Thompson also shoots photographs of the city's annual Jazz Fest and Blues Fest. The photos are often used on brochures. "I work pro bono, in exchange for access to the shows," he says.

And there's more. Thompson enjoys riding motorcycles as well. He's ridden cross-country to honor prisoners of war. Despite his growing inter-

ests, Thompson is committed to his company. He feels his business is doing well, despite the economic slump. "I take time to talk to people," he explains. "We send 'thank you' cards to everyone who places an order. And we send Christmas cards out, too. I think it makes a difference."

Thompson says he's creating more profits by adding more customers and focusing on marketing USA-made apparel to clients. He uses social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook to promote his work. "Recently, the orders haven't been as big, but we're getting more of them and that's helping," he says. "If you don't try new things, you'll never know what works."

daughter Courtney also works at the shop, which is one of the gems of Moultrie, GA. The town is known for its antique stores and its inviting southern hospitality. After the fire, it lived up to its reputation.

"Everybody has been so wonderful," Cox says.

"A restaurant brought us breakfast and lunch for a week and they wouldn't let us pay. Downtown merchants have paid for advertisements. The Chamber of Commerce named us the business of the month for December. The community, the insurance

company, just everybody was incredible."

After months of repairs, Heritage Embroidery was reinvented with new carpets, new paint and new products. Giving its owners an early Christmas present, the store was ready to be reopened in time for the

holiday shopping season. And this year, energized by grand reopening events like a formal ribbon-cutting, Cox has high hopes as well. "We have a great baby department and I'm going to spend time on that and our bridal registry too," she says. "We're going to do

a lot with monogrammed linens and home décor."

Asked if she forgives whoever set the fire, she quickly answers with kind conviction in her voice. "Most definitely, because I know it wasn't done maliciously," she says. "It could have been so much worse."