

photos by BILL BRISLER/staff photographer

John Sassak's latest fancy is "cosmic fantasies" like space cities and space probes, which simulate space experiences.

Dream weaver

Idea man turns concepts into products

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

John Sassak does what most other men only dream of. Sassak takes ideas and translates them into marketable products, making lots of money in the process. His litany of ideas run a wide gamut, from a tooling system for spin-lock screws in the 1960s, to computer logic and water deburring systems in the 1970s, to mechanical bulls and space flight simulators in the 1980s. His latest product is a solid lubricant, time released by heat into automotive engines. "I've always been able to take an idea and improve on it," Sassak said. But invention and development are just part of Sassak's formula. He must also accurately gauge consumer mood. "It's a matter of outguessing the market."



John Sassak Jr. buckles up for a ride.

"I've always been able to take an idea and improve on it."

— John Sassak



The capsule at the top of the tube rotates 360 degrees.

manufacturers involved." The space expo in Yokohama, where Sassak's space city will be exhibited, is expected to draw more than 25 million spectators. It is the second of two such events. The first is scheduled next year in Gifu.

Sassak is constructing a full-sized version of space shuttle Columbia for the event. Sassak's Columbia will contain Space Probe III rides in both rocket boosters.

Depending upon the success of the expos, the Japanese may build 10 space camps similar to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala.

Sassak expects to earn some

\$200,000 from his space-related business this year. But, he points out, the industry is in its infancy, especially in the United States. Sassak expects earnings to jump to \$10 million over the next five to 10 years.

It's a gamble and he knows it. Success in his business comes from being a half step ahead of current trends.

Sassak readily admits not all of his ideas are on the mark. "I'm talking about the ones that are successful. But I've been off a lot too."

COMPUTER LOGIC GAMES in the early 1970s were "on."

Sassak developed and manufactured solid state games. The hottest item was a wall game called In-trigue. It enjoyed great popularity in bars and lounges both here and abroad.

"We started off with nothing. We were brand new in the market. It was the first time we marketed a product."

The market was so big, no one company could handle it all, Sassak said, adding he grossed \$8-10 million annually from computer logic games between 1970-75.

When the video craze hit, computer logic became passe.

Sassak was prepared, with Safety-flow, a deburring process in which highly pressurized water cleans ragged edges left on metal objects.

As a sideline, in 1980 Sassak purchased the Urban Cowboy Saloon in Westland. The popular night spot had a capacity of 800 and featured a mechanical bull Sassak designed and built.

"It was about one year ahead of the cowboy craze that swept the country. My timing was perfect."

Watching saloon patrons ride the mechanical bull gave Sassak a new idea.

"It was dangerous. There were lots of accidents, even broken arms. I kept thinking there has got to be a safer product which the ordinary novice can actually experience and yet not get hurt."

Enter Saker. One Space Probe, the ride into space.

SASSAK'S PENCHANT for invention was honed, he said, during 19 years in product development with Ford Motor Co. "We didn't produce just cars."

He left Ford in 1959 and founded his own company, becoming partners with Russell, Burtel & Ward Inc., to market a tooling process for spin lock screws. While his inventions have earned millions of dollars over the years, "It takes millions to develop new products."

Most of Sassak's money is in investments, a 35,000-square-foot warehouse and office building on Schoolcraft Road, Center Stage co-op, a 100-acre farm in Canton and 50 million shares of stock in Saker One Corp.

The company went public in 1983

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Shredding secrets is secretive business

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Most people know about the Iranian takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979 and about Ollie North's recent testimony before the U.S. Congressional Committee investigating the Iran-Contra affair.

People squirmed when Iranian captors broadcast the contents of reconstructed shredded memos left behind by U.S. embassy officials, memos the captors had painstakingly glued back together piece by piece.

Ollie North and the Reagan presidency fessed up to trading arms for hostages with Iran and diverting proceeds to the Contras only after government investigators located key documents on computer disks North thought he had erased from the White House electronic system.

Both incidents highlight issues of grave concern to Lynn Murphy, president of Document Services Inc. in Livonia.

The firm is in the business of destroying documents, and security and secrecy are its forte. "If I'm handling your secrets, you want to be certain they are properly destroyed," Murphy said.

THE COMPANY practices what it sells. Document Services office and warehouse on Schoolcraft Road are unmarked except for the street number.



Lynn Murphy

ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Entry into the building is by appointment only. Otherwise, doors remain locked. Visitors are identified on a video security system prior to entry. Once in the building, visitors sign a security registrar and wear identification badges at all times.

"When interest in security is pushed like now, after the publicity surrounding the Iran-Contra affair, we go underground," Murphy said, explaining the locked doors, video system and ID badges.

"You could call this a bonded warehouse. Every employee has been given a security clearance and is bonded to the highest legal limit."

Some 75 employees work at the Livonia location. The facility serves as corporate headquarters. There are also offices in Atlanta, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Florida.

The firm, which uses a pulverizing process to destroy documents, was founded 20 years ago by John Thomas. Most of the machinery used in the pulverizing process was designed and patented by Thomas.

WHAT LOOKS LIKE coffee grounds are actually the remains of computer tapes, microfilm and the like after processing in one of Thomas' pulverizing machines.

The sawdust-like substance that lightly blankets machines and walls in the huge warehouse is all that's left of paper items subjected to a similar pulverizing process.

Materials headed for destruction travel slowly over a conveyor belt, raked by machine operators who periodically uncover more than computer disks and memo pads.

"It happens daily, finding things unintentionally headed for destruction," Murphy said. "We contact the appropriate people to see if they want them back."

The finds are varied, a silver-framed photo of a young couple, the bank deposit of a major corporation and six IBM personal computers from another corporation.

The young man in the picture did not want the portrait returned. He had thrown the picture away because he is getting a divorce. The bank deposit must have inadvertently been dropped into a waste basket and it was overlooked. The computers were probably an attempted employee theft, Murphy theorized.

"Technology has made things like computers so small, it's easy to steal."

ON OCCASION, the opposite occurs, with people frantically attempting to retrieve files before they are destroyed.

"They suddenly realize something is needed that was discarded," Murphy said, like projection reports, notepads or whatever.

Efforts to retrieve things are often unsuccessful. "We guarantee 24-hour service and we deliver," Murphy said, unless otherwise arranged for by contract. Then the firm will store materials for up to 60 days.

At 20 years of age, Document Services is a seasoned firm in a relatively new industry. When Thomas' uncle started a similar business 35 years ago, the primary method for disposal was hauling files to the local dump and burning them.

Corporate espionage, new freedom of information laws and an increased consciousness about security have changed things, according to Murphy. "In the old days, companies saved everything. Today, that's dangerous."

"Just suppose an employer jotted unfavorable comments about an employee into the person's personnel file. Ten years later the employee is fired and his attorney requests the file. Now we've got problems. The employee could sue."

"Companies are very conscious about what they keep today."

DECISIONS BY corporations, government agencies and others over what to preserve and what to destroy involves major decisions which, in the event of a civil law suit or a government investigation, must not be judicially viewed as self-serving.

Incriminating evidence, for example, cannot be destroyed after a suit or investigation is initiated. "The key to a successful destruction program is that it eliminate whole classes of files, ex-

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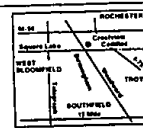


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