

BLF has futuristic approach

Award-winning BLF Marketing celebrates 30th anniversary

By **JIMMY SETTLE**
The Leaf-Chronicle

In its first 30 years, homegrown BLF Marketing groomed itself for sustainable business growth through a holistic approach to building profit for its clients.

Now, the company led by local men Jeff Bibb and Frank Lott, plus third partner David Hoke, is assuming a futuristic posture using innovative online conveniences to complement its award-winning achievements thus far.

With headquarters in downtown Clarksville and with an additional office in Nashville's MetroCenter Plaza 1, BLF has been concentrating in recent years on improving facilities and retaining its most talented staff.

Within its Jefferson Street office complex, BLF has knocked out some walls, and expanded and remodeled work space.

"Frank and I had an opportunity a few years ago to buy a half-interest in this building that we've been occupying since 1981," Bibb said.

The most-recent expansion came two years ago. "We've really worked hard on equipping our offices in Clarksville and Nashville with the latest technology and tying both offices together electronically to build a collaborative work environment that, among other things, curtails travel between the two offices," he said.

Lott added that all equipment in both the Clarksville and Nashville offices, down to the copy machines, is identical. "Our personnel travel between both offices, so we wanted all the equipment they work with to also be identical so they have that familiarity in both places."

The ultimate goal of these upgrades, and office expansion in Clarksville from the original 1,200 square feet, to 4,200 square feet, is to help reduce employee turnover.

BLF has on its staff: Human Resources Director Sharon Bibb — Jeff Bibb's wife — who has 25 years of service with the company, including leading the remodeling and expansion effort; senior designer Ron Watson, 24 years; senior production manager Vicki Parker, 15 years; and senior account manager Virginia Graves, 10 years.

"Our firm is well prepared to grow and prosper beyond what we ever imagined," Jeff Bibb said. "We have been blessed with great clients who have allowed us to pioneer innovative and successful marketing approaches in their behalf."

The Clarksville-based company now has clients in several states as far away as California. The firm specializes in financial, real estate, health care, business-to-business and tourism and museum marketing but has become best known for expertise in marketing services for community banking.



Beth Liggett Cogbill/The Leaf-Chronicle

Jeff Bibb, right, and Frank Lott, partners at BLF Marketing, look over an annual marketing plan Monday that the company wrote for F&M Bank in their Jefferson Street office.

BLF MARKETING

- **FOUNDED:** 1978.
- **OFFICES:**
103 Jefferson St., Clarksville (headquarters).
220 Athens Way, Nashville.
- **PARTNERS:** Jeff Bibb, Frank Lott and David Hoke.
- **EMPLOYEES:** 22 full-time, plus marketing consultants, partners and freelancers.
- **CLIENTELE:** Businesses in seven states representing banking, real estate and other industries.
- **WEB SITE:** www.blfmarketing.com.

One of its top clients today is locally owned F&M Bank, which BLF rebranded from its original business name, "Farmers & Merchants" to reflect a broader consumer reach.

Through innovative changes in its Web site, Bibb said BLF has sought to "integrate our client experience in a lot of different ways.

"Our client information is organized on the Web site where they don't have to enter through servers and firewalls. It's just an extension of what we've always been trying to do for our clients, by just taking it a little deeper," he said.

"What our company does today is very different from a mere ad shop. We provide a much wider range of services to help our clients develop marketing plans, branding, signs and merchandising, advertising, and much more.

"We're looking for companies that have a need to compete but may not always have the internal resources. For them, we become an outsourced marketing division," he said.

The first 30 years

The founding partners, Bibb and Lott, were almost fresh out of college in 1978 when they launched the beginnings of BLF Marketing.

Bibb previously worked for his alma mater, Austin Peay State Uni-

versity, as director of publication services.

Lott, a Murray State University graduate, had been the creative director at Jostens/American Yearbook Publishing. With big ideas and little capital, they acquired a \$13,500 equipment loan from First Trust & Savings Bank.

"Like most people who start a small business, we gave up steady paychecks in order to go out and forage for our supper," Bibb said.

They worked out of Lott's home, initially, to minimize expenses. "Frank and I felt there was a place for a marketing and advertising firm in this area of Middle Tennessee and southern Kentucky, and we were confident we could carve out a niche," he said.

By 1981, Bibb and Lott purchased their office building downtown at the corner of North First and Jefferson streets. There they focused on growing their own business and offering clients strategic marketing and creative services.

The purchase of Jefferson Square, Bibb said, was a "fortuitous choice" that allowed them to physically expand their offices.

"Our commitment has always been to make our clients' business and marketing interests a priority," Lott said. "In addition to planning and strategy, we recommend to our clients a logical media mix, develop

their brand, create their message and analyze the results of our clients' marketing efforts."

The company's first consistent account became Conroy, Marable & Holleman Real Estate. By the 1980s it had established long-term relationships with local companies such as Acme Boot, The Trane Co., First Trust & Savings, First National Bank, Averitt Lumber and Jack B. Turner & Associates.

The firm name became Bibb & Lott Advertising in 1984, and in 1991, when former Louisiana State University-Shreveport director of public relations Joel Fryer became a partner, the name changed again to Bibb, Lott & Fryer Marketing/Advertising. Fryer left and relocated to Louisville in 2006.

Hoke, now the third partner, had been affiliated with a Nashville-based advertising agency. He and his book of banking and real estate clients joined BLF in May 2002.

With his addition, and the company's expansion into Nashville in 2002, the firm simplified its name as BLF Marketing.

BLF has consistently won top marketing awards in state and national competitions. Most recently, it earned back-to-back first place awards from the American Bankers Association for clients F&M Bank in 2007, and The Peoples Bank of Winder, Ga., this year.

Locally, BLF worked with the Clarksville-Montgomery County Economic Development Council to launch the Aspire marketing program in 1996. BLF also created the Rivers & Spires logo.

Among their own extensive community involvement, Bibb chaired the Clarksville River District Commission from its inception, while Lott was a two-term board chair for the Customs House Museum and Cultural Center.

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