



Horace Barks, 1921-2012

Publisher was a 'legend' in trade magazine world

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Horace Barks, founder of Barks Publications Inc. and for more than 40 years publisher of the trade magazine Electrical Apparatus, knew from an early age that he wanted to work in journalism, his family said.

"He sold copies of the Saturday Evening Post when he was a little kid," said his wife, Elsie Dickson Barks, who was also his partner in business. "That reinforced his interest in having something to do with the magazine business."

Mrs. Barks said she had seen pictures of her husband from that time, with red hair and shouldering a Saturday Evening Post bag full of copies of the magazine.

"He sort of looked like a Rockwell painting," she said. "He sold a lot of copies."

Mr. Barks, 90, died of natural causes Tuesday, May 1, in Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago, according to his wife. He had lived on the Near North Side of Chicago since the late 1960s.

Mr. Barks, known to many as H.B., was born and grew up in St. Louis, where his father owned a printing business. He graduated from Westminster College in Fulton, Mo., in 1942 and joined the Navy, spending two years in the Mediterranean area as a communications officer.

After leaving active duty, he attended what was then the Medill School of Journalism of Northwestern University on the GI Bill. He majored in magazine production and earned a master's degree in 1947, then worked as a technical writer in Chicago for a few years before returning to St. Louis, intent on getting into the magazine business.

He soon founded Barks Publications in St. Louis and, as his wife put it, "started doing whatever he could do" as he worked toward producing his own magazine.

Through a friend's father, he had an opportunity to present a magazine idea to what was then the National Industrial Service Association, a trade organization whose members were involved in the repair and replacement of large rotating electrical equipment, according to Elsie Barks. The organization, now the Electrical Apparatus Service Association, went forward with the magazine as a house organ for its members.

"Horace Barks was a fixture and legend in the publishing world and one of the industries his magazine serves — electromechanical sales and service," EASA president & chief executive officer Linda Raynes said in an email.

Mr. Barks sold ads and attended trade shows for the fledgling magazine, "and that magazine just kept growing," his wife said.

Mr. Barks eventually met a Chicago publisher with a similar product and decided in the late 1960s to move his operation to Chicago and merge with the Chicago publisher.

But the merger didn't take and soon Mr. Barks had established his magazine, renamed Electrical Apparatus, as an independent publication, which it remains today. The glossy monthly reaches a subscriber list of more than 15,000.

Richard Nailen, engineering editor for the magazine, said the publication is aimed at people who design, specify, use, operate, maintain or repair electrical equipment.

"Something as small as a fuse you can hold in your hand to hydroelectric generators starting at 30 feet across," Nailen said. "It's definitely a niche, it really doesn't have any direct competition."

Nailen, who started writing for the magazine in the late 1970s and became engineering editor in 1995, said Mr. Barks paid close attention to the details of his business. "He was a Navy man," Nailen said. "He ran a tight ship."

But he didn't meddle with the writing. "He gave me a free hand and very little editing," Nailen said.

Mr. Barks stood out for his firm business ethics, according to Nailen, who said Mr. Barks was a stickler for properly crediting photographs and other material and expected the same of others. He would give permission to schools and repair shops to reprint material from the magazine, especially if it was for educational purposes.

"But he wanted to be asked," Nailen said. "He didn't like it if he wasn't."

Mr. Barks was active in several journalism organizations, including the Society of Professional Journalists, where he'd been a member since 1946. He served as president of its local chapter, the Chicago Headline Club, in the early 1980s.

Mr. Barks is also survived by daughters Elizabeth Van Ness, Kate Freed and Barbara Wachter; sons Joseph and William; and 12 grandchildren.

Services were held.