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**Small business profile**

**Coloring books grow up**

**Bell draws more than \$1 million from Really Big Coloring Books sales**

St. Louis Business Journal - July 12, 2002 by [Ron Janecke](#)

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Business activity: What started as a really fun idea has turned into a really good idea for Wayne Bell and his company, Really Big Coloring Books.

After seeing National Geographic's large books on animals, Bell came up with "Noah and the Ark," a coloring book that is 17 inches wide by 22 inches long. He sold a few thousand of the books on the side while working full time at another job, and then formed his own company, Really Big Coloring Books Co., which now publishes eight different books.

Bell comes up with the concepts for the books, works with organizations to develop the story line and calls on local artists to draw the characters.

All of the books are intended to be educational and many tie in with fund-raising events. In addition to the first book, the company produces "Twas the Night Before Christmas"; "Ag E. Bear"; "FFA at 75 Birthday Book"; "United We Stand"; "Dinosaurs"; "African-American Leaders," and "The Three Little Pigs."

"I came up with the Christmas book and started selling them at Christmas tree lots throughout the St. Louis area," Bell said. "I would drop off the books at the lots and split the money with owners of the lots." Many of the area lots are owned by Irwin Loiterstein of St. Nick's Forest.

The books feature Chris Mouse, a character who explains how farms grow trees and gives safety tips for Christmas trees in homes. Steve Drake, president and owner of Drake & Co., an association management firm, told Bell he was "sitting on a gold mine," and encouraged him to market the books through the National Christmas Tree Association. Today, more than 6,000 Christmas tree lots around the country sell the big coloring book.

Bell has a \$3 million, multi-year contract with the Future Farmers of America, which has collaborated with Bell on "Ag E. Bear"; "The Three Little Pigs" and the "FFA at 75 Birthday Book." The FFA, the largest student association in the country with more than a half million members in 7,000 chapters, provides the educational material for the books.

Similar to other organizations, the FFA uses the coloring books for fund raising.

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Organizations usually pay \$3 a piece for the books and sell them for \$6 to \$7 each. Retail outlets have been added and the coloring books are sold at barber and beauty shops, hospital gift shops, Christian book stores, dry cleaners, grocery stores, doctors' offices, clothing stores and florists. Two local retail outlets carrying the books are Wild Oats and Northwest Coffee.

The "United We Stand" patriotic book was in response to more than 700 requests Bell received within three months after Sept. 11. Included in the book are Irving Berlin's words to "God Bless America."

Many of the drawings in the books are the work of Phil Benson, owner of Funny Stuff Ltd., while Bell calls on other local artists for different drawings.

The "African-American Leaders" coloring book includes such present and former role models in the community as Colin Powell, Booker T. Washington, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan and Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

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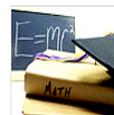
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