

# KARL ELLER

*From the Arizona Republic, Phoenix Arizona, Monday, August 20, 1984, by Margery Rose-Cappi*

The jangle of a midafternoon telephone call interrupts a conference in Karl Eller's modest office at Circle K Corp. on South 40th street. Eller snatches the receiver off its cradle. After greeting his caller briefly, he gets right to the point. "How's the market doing?" he asks. No one in the room knows whether he's referring to Wall Street or one of the convenience stores in his chain of Circle K's and recently purchased U-Totems.



"I guess I've been an entrepreneur since the day I was born," he says, once off the phone. His track record speaks for itself. In the last two decades, he has served as chairman of the board not only of Circle K but of Swensen's Ice Cream Co., an outdoor advertising company, and other corporations. Before Columbia Pictures Industries merged with Coca-Cola Co., Eller was President of Columbia Pictures Communications.

"I always wanted to be rich. I guess you can say a lot of it is luck; But it isn't all just luck. You have to make opportunities. I'm a guy who makes things happen. Just look what has happened here in the last 12 months," he said, referring to the date in July 1983 when he became chairman of

the board of Circle K.

Eller has been in business since he was 9, when he took a paper route. "I got up faithfully every morning at 4 o'clock," he said. "I always had to be the best. I guess I was an overachiever. When you're hungry, you've gotta work hard."

Eller said he didn't have an easy start. "I was the product of divorced parents, and I had to help support my mother. She ran a boardinghouse across the street from the Univ. of Arizona," he said. "I was the kind of guy who knew nothing but hunger, that you had to go out and work."

His family moved to Tucson from Chicago when he was 3. He was the youngest of three children. • Eller is an admitted workaholic. He said his career is more than a career; its a quest. "I'm a clear-cut decision maker," he said. He admitted that, after a continued regimen of speeches, meetings, more speeches and meetings, he sometimes burns out.

Eller set his sights on success early in life. After he finished high school in 1946, he and a buddy, Frank Borman, enlisted in the Army. Borman got a West Point appointment and went on to become an astronaut and, later, president of Eastern Airlines. Eller finished his military duty and enrolled at the University of Arizona, graduating in 1952 with a marketing degree.

He went to work for Foster and Kleiser Co., a billboard company. Two years later, the company sent him to San Francisco and then to Chicago, where he eventually became vice president in charge of the

Chicago office. In 1959 he joined the Chicago advertising agency of Needham, Louis & Brorby. He returned to Arizona in 1962, where he became president of Eller Outdoor Advertising Co.

Six years later, he and the owners of KTAR-TV agreed to merge their companies, creating the parent company of Combined Communications Corp. In June 1979, that company merged with Gannet Co., where he was a member of the office of chief executives.

He left Gannett at the end of 1980. At the time he had already added the chairmanship of the boards of Red River Resources- a land, oil and cattle investment business- and Swensen's Ice Cream Co. to his corporate collection. Then he went to work as president of Columbia Pictures Communications, and in 1982, the company merged with CocaCola.

Eller and his wife, Stevie, have been married 32 years. During the lean years of their marriage, she taught school. They have a married son, Scott, 27, whom Eller describes as "a venture-capital partner." The couple's daughter, Elissa, 24, sells telephone systems for Intertel.

He serves on the boards of Eastern Airlines, Arizona Public (54) Service, Southwest Forest Industries, and Intertel. He is also an original member of the Phoenix 40. • He recently funded a school of entrepreneurship at the University of Arizona. The first class, which will begin in September, will be held in the Karl Eller Center in the business school.

Eller proudly held up a plaque. "I received this not too long ago," he said, with a self-conscious smile. The award was from the American Academy of Achievement and named him a "giant of accomplishment." He was one of 40 Americans to receive the Golden Plate award at ceremonies in Minneapolis in July.

*[Eds. We thank EFA member, Calvin W. Evans, 201 East State Ave., Phoenix, AZ for sending the above newspaper article and other information about Karl Eller. We also thank Karl Eller for permission to reprint the story. It originally appeared in the May 1990 "Chronicles." ]*