

A Few Minutes With Steve Hanson:

FISCA'S 2005 CHECK CASHER OF THE YEAR | BY MARCIA BLITZ



Google “Hanson Management Corporation” on the internet and you’ll get long lists of licenses, old annual report information, and a three-line biography of Steven F. Hanson from his alma mater, Brigham Young University. What you won’t get is a vivid picture of the man who has been named FiSCA’s 2005 Check Cashier of The the Year. Behind the numbers is a mild-mannered 61-year-old executive whose life and ambitions have taken him from a childhood in Ogden, Utah, to the coast of Chile as a missionary, and then to the presidency of his own thriving corporation. And while he is a leading force and political advocate for the check cashing business, Hanson remains a devoted family man, rumored to have a secret identity as a fearless thrill-seeker. (More on that later!)

Steve Hanson’s rise to the top started with his decision to pursue a degree in Business Management from Brigham Young University in Utah. He must have known business was destined to be his career because as a student, the arts and sciences just didn’t seem as interesting to him. “A degree in business gives you a lot of options,” Hanson says. He would later add to his considerable

knowledge and skills with an MBA from the University of Utah and CPA certification in Oregon.

But before he went into business, Steve had selected another path – that of service to his country and his faith. Between college and graduate school, he was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Quartermasters Corps, stationed in Germany from 1970-72. His area was supply management, good training for the future executive. Earlier in life, Hanson had felt compelled to serve his church, the Church of Latter Day Saints. As a teenager he journeyed to the outskirts of Santiago, Chile, where he spent two years teaching about his religion. “It’s a common thing [in the Mormon Church] for 19-year-olds,” Hanson explains. “Missions are good experiences for learning about and interacting with other cultures.” To those who know Hanson as a man of faith, his mission should come as no surprise. No doubt his work in Chile prepared him for the teaching and vision that would be necessary in his eventual profession.

Once out of business school, Hanson was looking for a suitable challenge. He did a stint as a marketing representative for Boise Cascade’s Manufacturing Housing Division, covering the territory of Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming. In 1976, he continued his journey toward success by owning the master franchising license for Realty World Corporation of Oregon. This company provided a network of real estate brokers with all they needed to set up shop—training, business systems, advertising and other functions. Going the extra mile, as is his nature, Hanson served as chairman of the national advertising and convention committees in that organization.

His check cashing career began in 1982 when, with a partner, he opened and operated the Portland area’s first two check cashing stores. They were an immediate success.

continued on page 24



AT LAST HE COULD REVEAL
THE SECRETS OF HIS STRONG-ARM
LETTERS. AFTER ALL, HE IS
THE MAN FOR WHOM
THE PEN IS MIGHTIER
THAN THE SWORD.
FOR THAT, AND MUCH MORE,
FISCA HONORS
STEVE HANSON THIS YEAR.



This led to the 1984 formation of Hanson Management Corporation (HMC) in Vancouver, Washington, and Portland, Oregon. Hanson had found the work he loved.

Soon after opening HMC, Hanson wrote a comprehensive training and operational manual for those who worked for him. But helping his own employees wasn't enough. Now the entrepreneur's entrepreneur, Hanson wanted to help provide an alternative to franchising. He used his highly effective training manual as the basis for a consulting package to assist entrepreneurs in opening and operating check cashing businesses throughout the country. This innovative package offered a wealth of information that could be found nowhere else—demographic/marketing analysis, site selection advice, office design and layout, on-the-job training in check cashing and ancillary operations, how to develop local marketing strategies, accounting and control procedures, sources of supply, and other necessary functions. Hanson's clients – more than fifty of them including Don Early and Marylou Anderson – eventually used his groundbreaking training course to open more than 250 check cashing stores in dozens of states. He and his clients were giving back to their communities even as they achieved success by helping untold numbers of people who chose not to deal with banks.

Currently, Hanson and his partner Tom Shauklas operate Oak Brook Financial Corporation. With HMC, they now have 44 check cashing/payday loan stores in Oregon and Washington. Hanson also continues his service to the industry as the elected Director of the National Check Cashers Association since 1988, Vice President of

"HE HAS THE ABILITY TO DISTILL THE ISSUES IN A PROBLEM AND THEN BE RELENTLESS IN SOLVING IT. HE HAS AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO CONSUME LARGE AMOUNTS OF INFORMATION AND SIMPLIFY IT. IF YOU GIVE STEVE A PROJECT, IT WILL BE DONE COMPLETELY, TIMELY AND THOROUGHLY. HE IS THE GUY WILLING TO ASK THE HARD AND UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS. HE IS A FORMIDABLE OPPONENT IN BUSINESS."

the Community Financial Services Association of Oregon, and a respected leader of seminars and workshops at national conventions.

When it comes to the state of the check cashing industry, Hanson feels that its members must protect themselves from misguided and overzealous regulators. To that end, he has had a hand in crafting payday loan and check cashing bills presented in several states. "We must give consumers a choice," he states. He is optimistic about the industry although, since 9/11, its operations have grown increasingly complex and difficult.

Why, asked *Currents*, was Hanson named Check Cashier of the Year? Typically modest and soft-spoken, Hanson replies that it's probably the many contributions he's made

to FiSCA and his pioneering foray into the payday loan business in the late 80s. Not that this or any other honor will cause him to rest on his laurels. In fact, his Oak Brook partner sees Hanson at the top of his game. "Steve is analytical and tenacious," observes Tom Shauklas. "He has the ability to distill the issues in a problem and then be relentless in solving it. He has an uncanny ability to consume large amounts of information and simplify it. If you give Steve a project, it will be done completely, timely and thoroughly. He is the guy willing to ask the hard and uncomfortable questions. He is a formidable opponent in business."

And what else makes Hanson a formidable opponent? On a lighter note, Shauklas informs *Currents* that Steve his partner is

famous for his "poison pen" letters. "He subscribes to the adage by British novelist/playwright Edward George Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), 'Beneath the rule of men entirely great, the pen is mightier than the sword.' Although unassuming in person, Steve is most powerful in his writing; he wields his pen like a mighty David. I have seen him make a grown attorney cry (that's a tad of hyperbole)." Hanson laughs when hearing this praise, but acknowledges he "probably writes as good a letter as an attorney."

And then there is the matter of Hanson's daredevil alter ego. Out of his mild-mannered identity as Check Cashier of the Year, springs Tom Cruise in his *Top Gun* mode. Several years ago, with his oldest son Brooke, an Air Force captain, Steve Hanson

continued on page 27

took up parachuting for a few months. It was not a skill he'd learned in the army, yet he was fearless in jumping out of the plane. While he wouldn't want to make a career of skydiving, he admits it was fun.

Back on the ground, Hanson recently purchased a 1200cc BMW motorcycle.

It's been rumored (by Shauklas, of course) that he is contemplating starting a motorcycle club called "Hell's Check Cashers" and is going to ask that next year's FiSCA convention be held in Sturgis, South Dakota, where the famous Black Hills Motor Classic rally takes place. Hanson emphatically denies this rumor as "a complete exaggeration." He claims he bought the bike hoping to go touring sometime in the future, but since he "wrecked it a couple of times," it's been in the shop two-and-a-half months of the three months he's owned it. What may be worse—he doesn't think Tomi, his wife of 35 years, will ride behind him as a leather-clad motorcycle mamma. However, others in the Hanson family—daughter Brandi and youngest son Bryce—are happy to follow their father's path...off-road, at least. They now work for Oak Brook while Brooke and his wife, stationed in England, recently gave Steve and Tomi their first grandchild.

**"BUT PERHAPS, ONE DAY,
STEVE HANSON WILL WRITE
HIS OWN BESTSELLER,
DRAWING ON DECADES
OF BUILDING A BUSINESS
THAT STARTED WITH
THREE EMPLOYEES AND
GREW TO 150."**

If the motorcycle tour doesn't happen, Hanson will be content to travel by more conventional means; globetrotting is his favorite leisure activity. Name a place and Steve he has taken in its sights and gotten to know its people and culture. He's been virtually everywhere: Europe, Latin America, India, Thailand, Singapore, Bali and Japan. This past November, he returned from a two-week trip to China. Inspired by memories of his youthful mission, he has returned to Chile three times.

Finally, the most important thing Steve Hanson wants you to know about him is that he feels fortunate to be in a business he loves. He likes knowing that he is helping people into the mainstream. Unlike many other business leaders, he doesn't need to read bestsellers like *Who Moved My Cheese?*

for instruction or motivation. Nor does his company have to run on the trendiest business model. But perhaps, one day, Steve Hanson will write his own bestseller, drawing on decades of building a business that started with three employees and grew to 150. At last he could reveal the secrets of his strong-arm letters. After all, he is the man for whom the pen is mightier than the sword. For that, and much more, FiSCA honors Steve Hanson this year. ■