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MBJ Publisher Bob Hoig showed entrepreneurial bent early

If, as some say, entrepreneurs are born and not made, Midlands Business Journal founder and publisher Bob Hoig appears to fit the classic pattern.

Beyond that, he says, a bit of luck along the way doesn't hurt.

Hoig, 71, the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce's "Entrepreneur of the Year" for 2004, started his first business in the fourth grade, offering playmates a used lending library at a penny per book, fines two cents.

By the fifth and sixth grades, he was co-producing neighborhood circuses and running curbside lemonade stands.

But for eventually founding a newspaper, or any business, he said his luck began when he was a college dropout working in the basement of the old Ben Simon store on Lincoln's "O" St.

"I sold this rather well-dressed man a pair of shoes," Hoig said. "He asked if I was a college student, and I said 'Sort of - a dropout.'"

Asked what subject he had liked best, Hoig replied, accounting.

The man as it turned out was a partner in the former Lincoln CPA firm of Van Boskirk, Remington and Fry and, producing a business card, offered Hoig an entry level accounting trial.

"My job," Hoig said, "was to go out with teams of CPAs to small towns in Nebraska and Kansas and help with the audits of co-op creameries, one of the firm's niches.

"By day we'd audit. In the evenings there wasn't much to do in the average small town. So, we sat around talking about accounting."

Hoig said that bit of good fortune - learning to understand a company's finances and report them accurately - helped him countless times with his business dealings.



Bob Hoig in the Midlands Business Journal offices ... Classic entrepreneurial skills with a dash of luck.

Recently, the Journal was the subject of a routine sales tax audit by the Nebraska Department of Revenue.

Hoig's CPA, Milburn Sartin, said the agents had allotted two and a half weeks for their work. The audit was done in less than three days.

Hoig quoted Sartin as saying that on the way out the agents remarked the Journal's books were the best they had seen by a small business.

Hoig says another bit of his luck has been operating a family business.

His wife, Martha, is the firm's vice-president in charge of marketing and his sister, Cindy, vice-president of advertising. His daughter, Andrea, once worked for the paper but now owns her own newspaper, The Metro Monthly.

Recently he forgot about the family angle but was reminded.

In an interview for the short film to be shown at the Chamber's Top 25 luncheon set for May 18, Hoig had praised the role of MBJ's editors, reporters, photographers and others and of the thousands of area businesses whose stories have been told over nearly 30 years.

"Martha pointed out jokingly that without advertising, I'd still be chasing ambulances on the police beat," Hoig said, laughing.

More seriously, he told the

current issue of the Chamber's monthly "Profile" publication:

"Without the revenues they have provided through sales and the solid financial underpinnings this has meant for our news gathering efforts, we could not have survived."

Hoig's challenge to his staff is to tell the story of small businessmen and women in an interesting way with words and pictures.

A core staff of 16, headquartered at 1324 S. 119th St. in Omaha, produces the Midlands

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Continued from preceding page. Business Journal and other Hoig-directed business publications for Omaha, Lincoln and Council Bluffs.

Journal projects have included its annual 40/40 Awards, honoring 40 business and professional men and women under the age of 40.

The Women's Leadership Conference and the Commercial Real Estate Workshop are among events the Journal has gotten behind.

Its reporting has highlighted commercial and retail office space and issues important to engineering, legal, banking and accounting professions.

Producing the Omaha Chamber's "Buy the Big O" program

guide every October has been especially helpful to its growth over many years, Hoig said.

"Our management and writers have gained a closer knowledge of member businesses through our participation in numerous Chamber programs."

A native Kansan who was raised in Colorado Springs, Colo., Hoig dropped out of college after a year to start a business in 1952 selling sandwiches, ice cream and milk in sorority and fraternity houses, first at the University of Colorado and later at Nebraska University.

He folded that business at the end of a school year to travel the country, winding up in New York City.

Jobless and broke in the Big

Apple in 1957, and with no particular journalism background, Hoig chanced into the New York Daily News building and was given his first job in the industry – as a copyboy and later as a writer of Sunday features.

Hoig's career has included general assignment, crime and investigative reporting for the Lincoln (Neb.) Journal, the Miami (Fla.) News, UPI and the World-Herald, where he was that newspaper's 1970 Pulitzer Prize nominee for a series on sexual psychopaths.

He was nationally recognized by UPI in 1961 for his 10-day coverage of Bernice Geiger, the Sheldon, Iowa, bank official who embezzled \$2 million from her father's bank. The story was

headlined internationally in newspaper's as distant as Paris.

In the mid-1960s, Hoig was credited with authoring a plea carried over UPI's audio division which led to the surrender of Duane Earl Pope, the Kansas farm boy now serving a life sentence for killing three employees and wounding another person at the Farmers State Bank of Big Springs, Neb. Pope said he heard the plea in a Las Vegas motel room and decided to fly to Kansas City where he surrendered to FBI officials.

The fast-paced world of the old United Press – chronicled in the book "Deadline Every Minute" – was the crucible for Hoig's early training.