

BUSINESS

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Landmark buys
Chicago Internet provider

Group's founder makes own boundaries

BY JUAN-CARLOS RODRIGUEZ

Medill News Service

The switchblade, the four ship bomb burst luberry and the missing man pass don't pop up in conversations around the water cooler at insurance offices every day. But at Rippinger Financial Group Inc., precision formation aerobatics are as much a part of the boss's life as policies, beneficiaries and premiums.

Success stories

John F. Rippinger, the 57-year-old founder, president and "chief visionary officer" of the Schaumburg-based Rippinger Financial

Group, is an avid pilot of both airplanes and balloons. He has been a member of the Lima Lima Flight Team, the only six-aircraft civilian formation aerobatic team in the world, for 13 years.

Rippinger, or "Ripper," as he is known on the team, likens the difficult aerial maneuvers they execute to a play performed thousands of feet in the air.

"It's predictable, but very dangerous," he said.

When he's not flying his yellow Beech T-34 Mentor at events like the Gary Air Show, at which Lima Lima performed on

Business profile

Name: Rippinger Financial Group of Companies

Business: Insurance

Location: Schaumburg

Founder and president: John F. Rippinger of Schaumburg

Employees: 35

July 17 and 18, Rippinger is brainstorming new niches to fill in his booming retail and wholesale insurance operations.

Rippinger Financial Group companies provide employee benefit planning, executive compensation planning, and estate and retirement planning for businesses, business owners and individuals.

"Over the last three years, we've had about 25 percent compound growth," Rippinger said. He is planning on doubling his office space and adding at least four more employees to his staff of 35.

His title of chief visionary officer reflects his role as the idea man and envelope-pusher.

"I don't follow the idea that to be suc-

cessful you have to plan on 10 percent increases each year," he said, "I want to be the one to go from \$1 million in revenue to \$20 million."

On July 1, Rippinger unveiled an innovative Web site, InsuranceLook.com, that hosts pages for a number of brokers, and lets them and their clients choose policies from his companies and pay online. Coverage begins within 24 hours.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Rippinger Financial Group, an umbrella organization for seven insurance service companies, each now run by a vice-president.

The delegation of authority to his vice-presidents is part of Rippinger's strategy to keep his focus on the big picture.

"I'm not a salesman; my specialty is running companies," he said.

When he hires a vice president, that person enters into an agreement that gives him or her the first crack at buying the company should Rippinger die or decide to sell it.

The vice presidents have the luxury of concentrating on working in their specialty field without having to worry about day-to-day corporate operations.

"I provide the capital and the resources to nurture them."

Rippinger was born in Aurora in 1946.

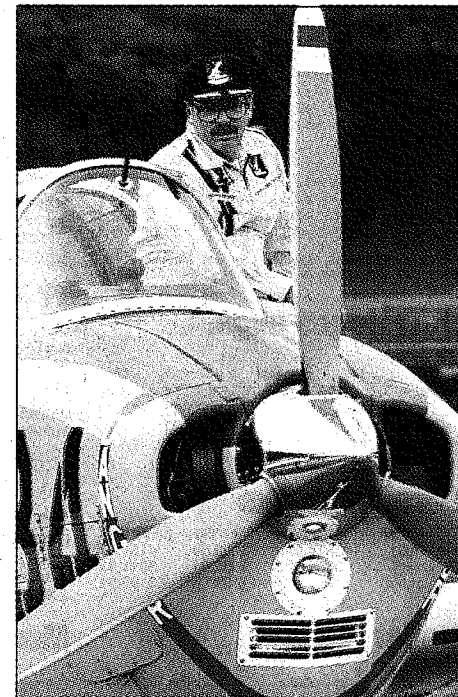


PHOTO COURTESY JOHN F. RIPPINGER
John F. Rippinger, 57, founder of Rippinger Financial Group, flies this Beech T-34 Mentor at air shows along with other members of the Lima Lima Flight Team.

His father was a B-24 Liberator pilot in World War II. He attended high school at Marmion Academy in Aurora, during

Success:

Charity has been a priority

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which time he began his affair with aviation. He can recall only one year since 1964 in which he didn't log a single hour in the air.

He graduated from Harper College in Palatine with a degree in photo microscopy — taking photos with a microscope — but got in the insurance business at the age of 25 in 1972 as an agent, mostly in life and group health policies.

In 1984, he founded Rippinger Financial Group. The firm administers more than 150 health plans for small to medium-size closely held corporations. Entering the life and health brokerage business in 1994, his wholesale companies now serve more than 2,500 Illinois brokers.

Thomas McLeary, president of Endow Inc., a Chicago-based insurance planning and consulting business, has been a client for about three years.

"We use John because these days, in the financial services industry, it's hard to be an expert on everything. So John manages our group benefits area for our clients," McLeary said. "We think they're the best in the area."

Dan McNair, benefits specialist at the Medinah-based William J. Kamm and Sons, Inc., has been a customer for about four months.

"For an agent like me, it's a great one stop shop," he said.

"There's always a live body answering the phone."

In addition to the Lima Lima team, Rippinger spends time with the Angel Flight charity, helping fly needy children to specialty clinics and hospitals.

Rippinger also gives each employee the opportunity to get out of work one day a year and help a charity of his or her choice. "Corporations need to do a lot more charitable work," he said.