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Dallas Business Journal



In the vault
'Seinfeld's' Newman
would be
proud

Bobbie Cox, left, and Chuck Hosier launched Postal Vault Inc. before identity theft became the latest buzz. Now the duo is poised to deliver strong revenue.

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FEBRUARY 18-24, 2005 | \$2.00

Lawyer draws bead on Metroplex

Atlanta attorney tussles with cities over constitutional right to erect billboards

BY CHAD ERIC WATT | STAFF WRITER

An Atlanta attorney who's made his living battling local billboard laws has brought his business to North Texas.

Separate but practically identical lawsuits against the Dallas County cities of Cedar Hill and Mesquite argue that their sign regulations restrict free speech.

The two cities face a well-practiced opponent.

Over the last eight years attorney E. Adam Webb has sued at least 97 times to get billboards constructed where local governments have banned them.

Most of his suits are against small suburban towns. Hoover,

Ala., Buford, Ga., Plant City, Fla., and South Holland, Ill., have all been targets of the billboard suits. They all share some common features: They're near major highways and big cities in prime territory for billboards.

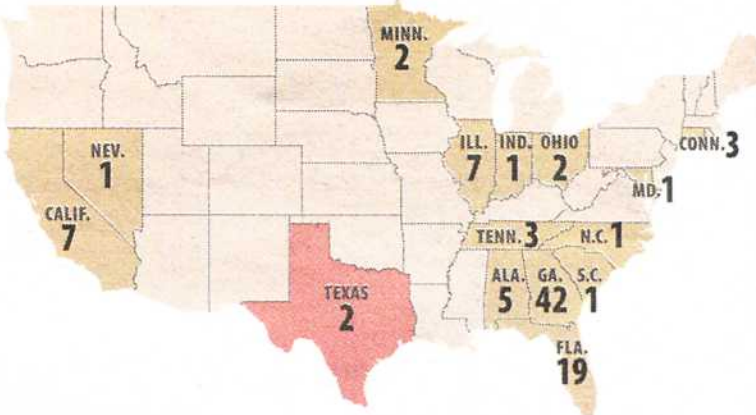
Court records show that it's rare that the lawsuits produce outright wins for Webb. But in this line of work, a settlement can be as good as a win.

Webb couldn't say how many billboard suits he has filed or how often he had won a billboard suit, but he said that his clients are usually satisfied with the result.

"We've obtained a satisfactory

BATTLEGROUND STATES

E. Adam Webb has sued at least 97 times to get billboards constructed where local governments have banned them.



SIGN, P15

Dickey's smokin' with expansion plan



Barbecue joint to add 20 new stores in N. Texas in '05

BY DAVID GIDDENS | STAFF WRITER

Dickey's Barbecue Restaurants Inc. is about to find out

Sipera nabs \$6.3M in VC funds

BY JEFF BOUNDS | STAFF WRITER

In 1997, Krishna Kurapati co-founded IPCell Technologies Inc., a Richardson software company.

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THEY'VE GOT MAIL: Bobbie Cox, left, and Chuck Hosier with Fort Worth-based Postal Vault Inc. hope the growing popularity of their products will help create awareness of identity theft.

SAVVY SOLUTIONS

Unsecured mailboxes are a tempting target for identity thieves, but they come up short if they try to break into a Postal Vault

Unsecured mailboxes are a tempting target for identity thieves, but they come up short if they try to break into a Postal Vault

Letter lockup

BY CHRISTINE PEREZ | STAFF WRITER

Six years ago, former construction executive Bobbie Cox and her husband, Jim, were working on a newfangled mailbox they hoped to introduce to the market. Made of steel, an interior protection slot keeps mail locked up safe and out of the reach of thieves.

The couple designed a prototype and installed it in the front yard of their Dallas home. But that November, tragedy struck when Jim Cox unexpectedly died in his sleep. Already mourning the loss of her father, who'd died three months earlier, Bobbie Cox packed up her daughter and escaped to their vacation home in North Carolina.

When Cox returned home, she found three weeks' worth of mail stacked up in the mailbox, safe and secure.

"I had gone to North Carolina to think about what I was going to do with my life, how I was going to move forward," she said. "When I returned and saw how the mailbox had worked, I thought, 'There is a message here.'"

Cox immediately got busy, working out of the basement in her home. She asked family friend Chuck Hosier,

a sales director with food-wholesaler AmeriServe and former regional marketing director for McDonald's Corp., to come on board in early 2000.

The duo launched Postal Vault Inc. and introduced their mailboxes at the 2000 National Association of Homebuilders show in Dallas. The product was a hit, but an announcement of impending regulation changes from the U.S. Postal Service put the company on hold.

Cox and Hosier took advantage of the product-development lull to focus on marketing. An advertising agency executive told them they had two things going for them.

"The first was, it was a new product category, so no one owned a brand name in the segment," Hosier recalls. "The second thing he said was, 'There's something on the horizon that's piquing our interest, something called identity theft.'"

A novel concept in 2000, identity theft has since become the fastest-growing white-collar crime in America. A recent study by San Diego-based Identity Theft Resource Center found 7 million people were victims of identity theft from July 2002 to June 2003. The crime grew by 20% from 2001 to 2002, and by 80% from

THWARTED, P36

POSTAL VAULT INC.

BUSINESS: Makes theft-proof mailboxes
HEADQUARTERS: 512 Main St., Suite 1300,
 Fort Worth 76102
OWNERSHIP: Private
TOP EXECUTIVE: Bobbie Cox, president
 and CEO
EMPLOYEES: 15
ANNUAL REVENUE: \$5 million (projected,
 2005)
PHONE: 817-347-8000
WEB: www.postalvault.com

THWARTED: Identity thieves

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2002 to 2003.

Cox said more than 9 million people were victims in 2004. "Just 12% of identity theft happens electronically," she said. "That means 88% is happening either through dumpster diving or unlocked mailboxes."

With the new USPS regulations released in 2001, Cox and Hosier fine-tuned the product and went to work on distribution. They've since convinced Lowe's, The Home Depot, Sam's Club and Elliott's Hardware to take it on. Sales have been growing at an annual 300% to 400% clip, Hosier said. He's projecting \$5 million in revenue for 2005 and \$20 million in 2006.

With little cash to spend on marketing, Cox and Hosier rely on strategic alliances to help spread the word. They scored a coup last year when the American Advertising Federation selected Postal Vault to be the focus of its next student competition, an honor usually reserved for *Fortune* 100 companies like Visa, Eastman Kodak Co. and Chrysler Corp.

"We convinced them it would be great to give students a chance to launch a product category and create a brand," Hosier said. "Back in the 1980s I

REGULATION REASONS

Small-business owners hope Congress makes more progress in regulations that cut into the bottom line

President George W. Bush has outlined an aggressive agenda for his second term.

Tackling the complexity of the tax system, reforming social security and the legal system as well as making more headway on health-coverage costs are important issues for businesses of all sizes. But how high a priority is regulatory reform?

As the Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy reports, regulatory costs impose a disproportionately higher cost on small firms. Per-employee regulatory costs are nearly \$7,000. While the Office of Advocacy saved small businesses \$6 billion in 2003 through aggressive enforcement of laws that require regulatory agencies to determine the impact of their proposed rules on this sector, current regulations on the books — particularly tax compliance and paperwork costs — are burdensome.

House Majority Leader Tom Delay, R-Texas, recently stated that "universal regulatory reform" is a key priority for House Republicans. A reform package has not been unveiled yet, but in simple terms the approach will probably include broad reforms and measures that would apply to all agencies.

For example, requiring agencies to include a regulatory budget (that is totaling the costs of each agency's regulations) within the federal budget would provide Congress and the public with a better sense of the government's total cost.

Options

If this universal approach is slow in getting legislative traction in either house, more targeted initiatives are taking shape that aim to fix problems with specific agencies (or laws) that have been imposing undue hardship on small firms.

With respect to the Occupational Safety and Health Act, for example, a set of four



SMALL BUSINESS

Karen Kerrigan

regulatory bills moved through the U.S. House in 2004 that may have a shot at passing both Houses in the

109th Congress. The reforms would increase responsiveness, flexibility and fairness in how the agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Commission deal with small businesses.

The Paperwork Regulatory Improvement Act also moved with great speed and bipartisanship in the House last year. Among other measures, the bill would require that the Office of Management and Budget boost its efforts to highlight opportunities within the Internal Revenue Service for paperwork reductions.

The formation of the Federal Tax Advisory Panel may also present opportunities for targeted simplification and paperwork reduction measures. Now that President Bush has announced its members, the panel will actively solicit ideas from the public and business to "simplify the tax code."

In 2004, the OMB identified 189 regulatory reform nominations that particularly hurt the manufacturing sector. As a follow up, the Office of Advocacy pinpointed 48 out of the total list that would be particularly helpful for small manufacturers. As a next step, federal agencies are reviewing and providing feedback to the OMB. A report is expected soon with respect to how these regulations can be streamlined, updated or eliminated.

Endangered species

Reform efforts also have been taking shape on the Endangered Species Act. Republicans and Democrats are con-

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worked on the team that brought out Chicken McNuggets, so I knew how rare an opportunity that was."

More than 6,000 students at 210 universities will create campaigns for Postal Vault in a competition that ends in the summer of 2006.

Charlie McLean, a real estate investor who lives in Farmers Branch, bought a Postal Vault mailbox about 18 months ago, after thieves stole his mail and used his credit-card number, which had been printed on a bank statement, to charge \$350 worth of food at a local barbecue joint.

"Unless you're a plastic man or have arms 50 inches long, you're not going to steal any mail out of it," McLean said.

Seven months ago, a neighbor crashed his Hummer into McLean's mailbox. "The Postal Vault was dented but not broken, and my mail was safe," he said. "My neighbor had \$6,000 in damages to his Hummer."

cperez@bizjournals.com | 214-706-7120

TWO MINUTES WITH **Norry Nivens** Stone Core Films Inc.

Nivens, partner/director, writes, directs and films TV commercials for the company he co-founded in 1993. Known for cutting-edge work, his Stone Core Films has worked for agencies including Tracy Locke Partnership, Moroch/Leo Burnett, and A. Goff Co., and has done spots for clients ranging from Sea World to Showtime. He was interviewed by Staff Writer Cynthia D. Webb.

Q: What trends do you see for TV commercials in 2005?

A: This year we'll see more and more television commercials in places we least expect to see them. They'll be showing up in video games, on your cellphone, in the back-grounds of movies and just about anywhere you can hang a flat-screen monitor.

Q: Do you foresee doing most of your work in North Texas?

A: We get the best value for our dollar by staying here. It's always 20% to 30% more expensive for us to shoot spots anywhere else in North America — and add another 10% to that if you shoot in Los Angeles. With the U.S. dollar suffering, Canada isn't even a good option for a cost-conscious client.

Q: What type of incentives might help bring or keep film business here?

A: We have just about everything and everyone we need here for great production and "post." What we need is a back-lot facility where the rest of the nation could come and shoot exteriors to replicate any location in the world.

cwebb@bizjournals.com | 214-706-7156

