

What I Learned

... From Working For My Father: Tim Larsen, president, Larsen

As Seen in **TwinCities**
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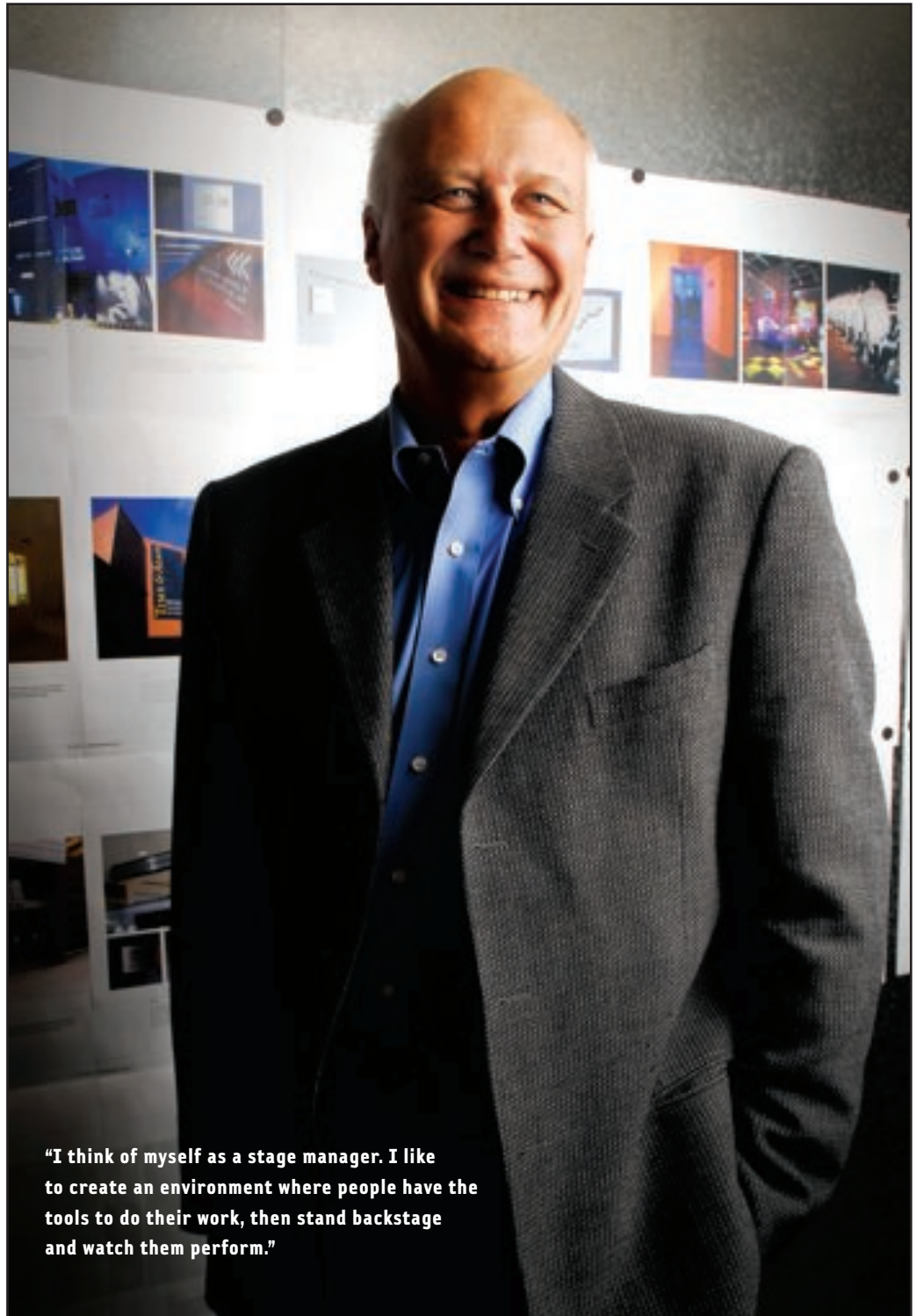
➤ *Tim Larsen founded Larsen, a Minneapolis design firm, in 1975 and opened a second office in San Francisco in 1998. But before his firm had clients such as Piper Jaffray and Microsoft, Larsen learned about business at his Dad's movie theater.*

"My father owned the Capital Theater in downtown Bismarck, North Dakota. I started working there when I was 12, making popcorn and selling candy. The first thing I learned there was how to make change. Pop was 10 cents and a candy bar was a nickel, so we were dealing with a lot of nickels and dimes.

"We'd change movies twice a week and that meant going up an 18-foot ladder to change the lettering on the canopy outside after the last movie. There were a ton of small 15-watt light bulbs that ran around the canopy, and we had to replace them frequently, often when the wind was whipping and it was 30 below.

"My father, whose name is Don, also taught me not to micromanage. Even when I was 12 and my brothers were 16 and 18, he didn't micromanage us. The three of us ran the theater in the summer, opening it at noon, running the movie, cleaning up, locking up, and going home for dinner, then going back that evening and doing it all over again.

"My father encouraged me to go into business for myself rather than to work for someone else, and became kind of a business advisor to me. When I started the company and was hiring employees, I told him, 'All these employees seem to do is complain.' He said, 'You can have employees who complain and employees who don't complain. You can have employees who care and employees who don't care. But you can't have employees who care and who don't complain.'" **TCB**



"I think of myself as a stage manager. I like to create an environment where people have the tools to do their work, then stand backstage and watch them perform."

PHOTOGRAPH BY TRAVIS ANDERSON

Vicki Stavig (vstavig@comcast.net) talks lessons in life and commerce with business leaders each month.