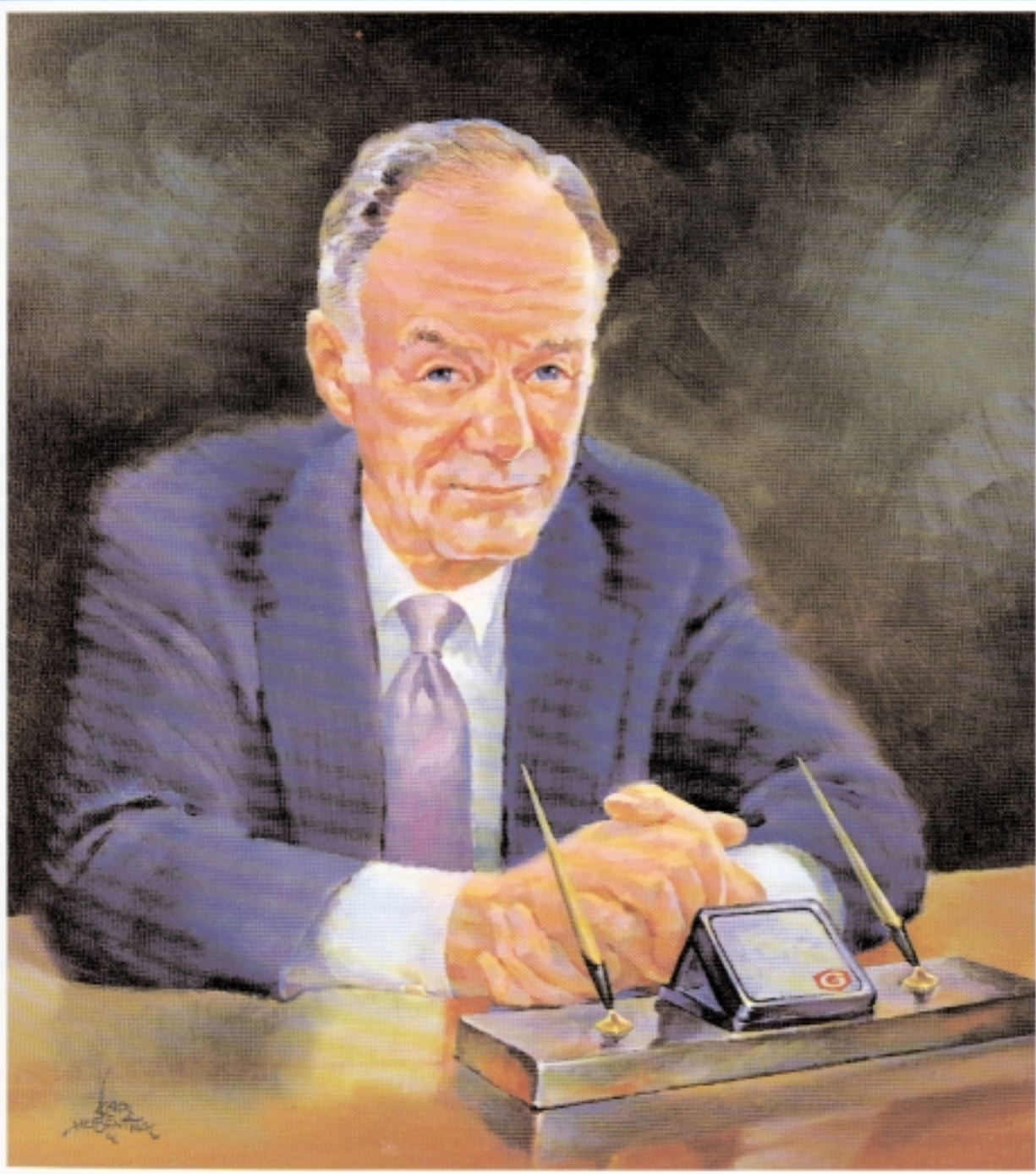


VOLUME 27  
SUMMER 1990  
NUMBER 3



# THE M.C. GILL DOORWAY

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# Hometown Perspective

## THE PERSONAL SIDE OF M.C. GILL

BY LAURIE RAHN

*INTRODUCTION: When M.C. visited his hometown of Terril, Iowa, in November 1989 he was interviewed by Laurie Rahn, staff writer for the Spirit Lake (Iowa) Beacon. After reading her article in the Beacon he was quite taken with her writing style. It focused on the personal side of his life, omitting for the most part, his role as a pioneer/founder/entrepreneur—an approach seldom taken. As a result, the decision was made to invite Mrs. Rahn to Los Angeles for a few days to collect background material for the following article on the anniversary of the M.C. Gill Corporation's 45th year in business.*

**T**hank you, M.C. Gill.

As the result of one phone call I enjoyed six exciting, insightful days. It all began last November when I received a reporting assignment by default. In other words, it was a Sunday afternoon and no one else on the staff was particularly eager to cover it. When I left my family in the middle of a sunny Iowa day, I admit to wondering why I'd volunteered. But after two short hours in Terril, I needed anchors to keep my feet on the ground. Some people are infectious. M.C. Gill is one of those.

A self-made millionaire from Los Angeles, Gill was raised in Terril, Iowa. He was in his hometown that November day to attend an open house for a new plastic molding company called Terril Plastic Molders. It was

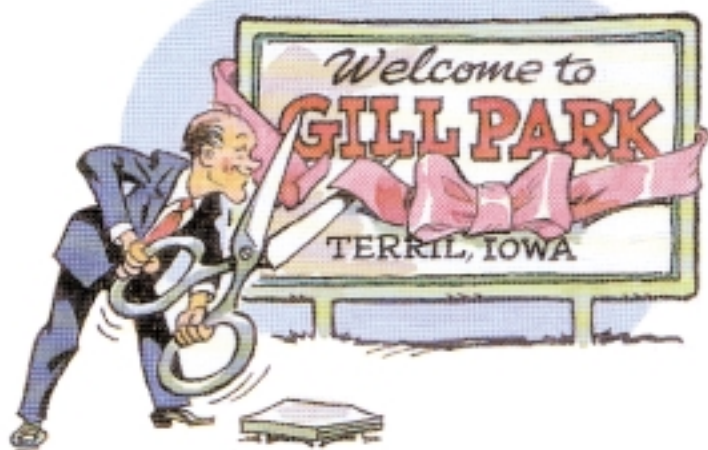
Gill's donation to the city's development fund that had helped finance the new plant. During the afternoon's festivities, city officials talked about the new company, they gave eloquent speeches about the future of their town, and recognized Gill's generosity by renaming the city's only park, Gill Park, in honor of the Californian's parents.

Most of my time that afternoon was spent in the background, simply listening to Gill's conversations with others. Initially, this wasn't by choice, but M.C. was constantly surrounded by a throng of old friends and acquaintances.

A babysitter from M.C.'s days as a child was on hand reminding the former Iowan of an incident involving a kerosene spill. It seems M.C. had gotten the fuel on his trousers. The babysitter, concerned that the liquid might burn the boy's legs, began to chase Gill around the neighborhood. She was determined to catch her charge, and he was equally determined that no woman was going to take down his pants. Gill eluded her chase.

*They had so many stories to tell.* And there was nothing in M.C.'s manner that told anyone to hurry. Each person was given his undivided attention, even rookie reporters there by default.

After most of the people had left the small community building to tour the new plastics factory, I introduced





myself and Gill invited me to walk along with him. We talked about his roots in Terril, his years as a student, the formation of his company, his memories... During our conversation Gill had offered to send some of his company's quarterly publications, *The M.C. Gill Doorway* and I'd given him one of my business cards, figuring it would be misplaced somewhere between Terril and Los Angeles. But, several weeks later, a manilla envelope arrived, containing an assortment of issues.



As I sat down in our family room to scan the articles, I remember feeling my skepticism surface. I'd come to the conclusion since our meeting that M.C. Gill simply could not be the person he appeared to be. A man in his position had to be a master in public relations, and perhaps even unscrupulous, to become as successful as he had become.

**M.C. Gill proved me wrong.** So, I shouldn't have been surprised when his office called during the wildest part of a March snowstorm. Did I remember M.C. Gill, the distant

voice asked? Of course. Well, he certainly remembers you, the Marketing Services Manager said. Would I be interested in writing an article on the company's 45th anniversary for the *Doorway*? It would mean spending a few days in Los Angeles.

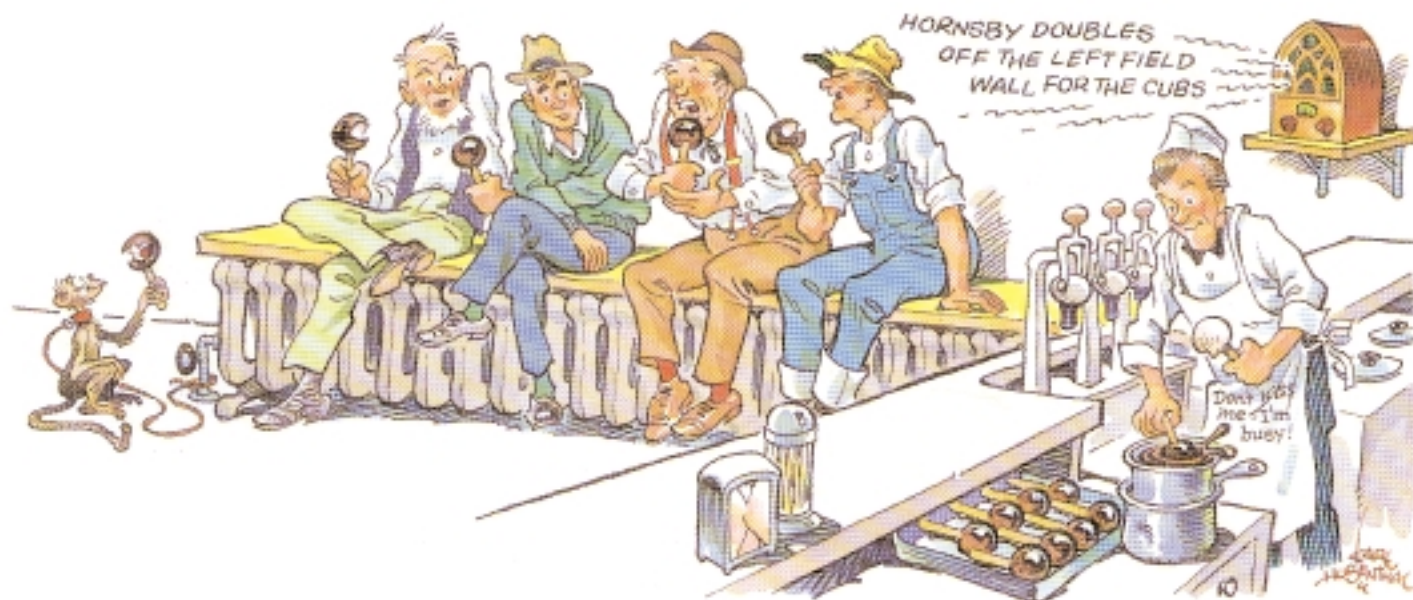
The journey to get to the bottom of this phenomenon named M.C. Gill began in late April.

My adventure began at the Burbank airport, where I was met by M.C. Gill himself. Having done my homework, I knew from an article by syndicated columnist Mel Durslag, that M.C. is not a man to spend money foolishly or be concerned with social pressures from his peers. After all, this is a man still brown-bagging his lunch everyday. In the next six days I discovered there are certain things M.C. Gill likes, certain things he believes in, and in those areas M.C. cuts no corners.

Cars happen to be one of M.C.'s loves, from his everyday Jaguar to the Maserati and the Citroen he keeps under cover in his driveway.

Most people around M.C. are astounded by his uncanny ability to remember names and dates. But Gill's memory isn't an accident. He has kept diaries since he was a child. The daily entries aren't lengthy, but serve as reminders years later when he rereads his writings. Each night after composing a new entry, he re-examines his writings for the same day from a previous five-year period. When college roommate Dick Bean found out Gill had installed a safe in his home, Bean asked, "What do you keep in your safe?" thinking wife Ellen's jewelry and the like. "But M.C. said he kept his diaries and 8mm home movies he started taking in 1939 in the safe." Gill holds on tightly to his memories and his still strong ties to the Midwest.

Merwyn Carlyle Gill was born in Terril, Iowa on July 30,







1910, the only surviving child of Carl and Maude Gill. And even as a child, M.C. was, by all accounts, a go-getter.

The Gills owned and operated the town's corner drug store for many years. The soda fountain inside was the town's most popular gathering place. The soda fountain attracted the people, but once there it was the steam radiator at the front with a one inch thick board on top where customers would sit and eat Moccos and listen to the Cubs or White Sox games on the radio, that kept them there. (A Moco consisted of a scoop of vanilla ice cream with a stick inserted and dipped in chocolate. It was named after a popular cartoon character of the day—an Eskimo heavyweight fighter managed by Battling McNat, a flyweight. A maraschino cherry was inserted in every 12th one and whoever got that one received the next one free.)

Vernon "Zip" Koon was one of M.C.'s best childhood friends. "There were maybe 420 people in town when we were growing up, and that's counting the dogs and cats," said Koon. "In a town that size the boys would date girls from out of town. People would ask us what was wrong with the girls in Terril. There wasn't anything wrong, it's just that we were like siblings. We were so close," said Koon.

Zip Koon, who had polio as a child, was eight when he started school with the much smaller Merwyn Gill. He remembers his pal as "an individualist, a little ornery." Through the years, the pair managed to get into their share of trouble, much of it at the expense of the school superintendent.

The superintendent was a stout man, and Koon recalls the administrator often found fault with M.C.'s antics. When it came to mischief, says Zip, "I was sneaky about it. M.C. said there was no point in being sneaky. He did his thing, then took his lumps."

The mayor in town at the time was the barber, "Suds" Hewitt. His daughter, Eva, although several years younger than M.C., spent a lot of time with Gill at the soda fountain listening to jazz from Chicago's Trianon and Aragon ballrooms after the store closed.

Eva said her father found it necessary to rescue young Gill on at least one occasion. "There was a flagpole in the center of town and it was a big thing to drive around it in circles as fast as you could. One day Merwyn decided to try it," said Eva. Koon remembers the same incident. "He'd (M.C.) gone all the way to the end of the street in a Model T Ford coupe to get as much speed as he could. Suds must have seen what he was up to and went out and just stood in the street with his arms raised, staring at M.C.," said Koon. "Suffice to say, M.C. never did get to circle the flagpole."

Reflecting upon their years growing up, Koon feels Carl and Maude Gill played a big part in their son's solid foundation. "He got a pretty good set of values from his parents. They were solid citizens. We respected our elders. Not that the parents loved their children any more then, but they instilled respect for other people. Roots are important," Koon explained.

*In keeping with his reputation* as an individualist, Merwyn Gill brought a little extra-ordinary excitement into his hometown one day many years ago. A teenager at the time, Gill still remembers the day "Satan," his pet monkey, arrived in a wooden crate on the back of the drey. "I don't think he ever liked me," says M.C. But like it or not, the duo were quite a pair. (Editor's note: With very little encouragement, M.C. will talk for hours about that \*\*\*\*&







monkey.) Eva (Hewitt) Bramen lived just three houses down the street from the Gill household, and says "Merwyn always seemed to be chasing the monkey around and trying to get it out of a tree."

Later, as M.C. began attending classes at Estherville Jr. College in Estherville, Iowa, Satan would make the 13 mile train trip along with his master. Gill carried the monkey on board in a leather satchel and, by luck, usually missed detection by the conductor. "He'd stick his fingers out through the top of the satchel and I'd have to keep pushing them back in," says Gill. "If I'd been caught, I'd have to pay an extra fare."

The country was engulfed in a depression, and young people found it very difficult to go to college in the 30's and M.C. found himself attending a semester at a time, then pausing to work at the family drug store and in that way stringing a four year degree over ten. M.C. eventually transferred to the University of Minnesota, continuing his studies in engineering. Three years later, he made the move to Los Angeles, and with the move came what has proven to be a lasting relationship with his alma mater, the University of Southern California.

The small town Iowan moved into a house on 36th Street, a street which now is called Childs Way and is part of the USC campus itself. He lived there with a group of young men, students with different interests and diverse backgrounds. Dick Bean was one of M.C.'s roommates and remains a close friend today.

Bean recalls moving into the two-story house. The second story [the "penthouse"] consisted of one room

and M.C. occupied it. He played phonograph records there with the girls from next door.

M.C. Gill's life changed completely when Ellen Wildy and her twin sister, Evie, moved into an apartment next door, and on their first evening in residence, leaned out their second story window and whistled at the gang in M.C.'s room. "After that you'd never see him and Ellen apart," said Bean.

He cited one example. "Gill loved going to USC basketball games, but they weren't necessarily Ellen's favorite activity, she'd fall asleep during every game. And she knew she would, but she went every time."

One of Bean's favorite stories revolves around a lonely Christmas holiday. Everyone in the house, as well as the girls next door, had gone home for the holidays. The only two left behind were Bean, who said he didn't have anywhere to go, and M.C., who couldn't afford to go anywhere. But Gill decided that they were at least going to have a house that looked like Christmas. The pair carried home a tree by hand, stood it in a brass spittoon they'd appropriated from a passenger train, and proceeded to decorate the evergreen. But they weren't finished yet, M.C. deciding that he wanted a Christmas wreath too. The



roommates found themselves going down the street to their landlord's service station and hauling back an old tire. They cut "Merry Xmas" out of green toilet paper, attached the letters to the tire, put a light up through the bottom and somehow managed to hang it in a window for the world to see. The story typifies M.C. Gill having the vision to know what he wants to do and, against all odds, being able to do it. It is an integral part of his success today.

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*This hometown perspective will conclude in  
the Fall issue of the Doorway.*

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# Five Year Look Back

BY PAUL W. DeGOOD  
MANAGER, MARKETING SERVICES

In our 40th Anniversary issue, M.C. set out a number of goals he expected the company to achieve by September 1990. At the time, they looked more like a rather formidable wish list than a set of realistic attainable achievements. To paraphrase a quote in Part 2 of our cover story, "He has the knack to challenge you to work harder than anyone else and not mind it." He does...and we did. And most of the goals, including all the significant ones, have become realities.

## *Expanded Facilities to 175,000 sq. ft.*

Back in 1985, M.C. predicted that it would be a good bet we would erect Building 6 with about 40,000 square feet. On May 4th of this year we broke ground for that facility. When completed, it will have 37,000 sq. ft. under roof and will be devoted to raw materials storage and finished goods production. Building 6 brings our total square footage under roof to more than 175,000, a rather significant increase over the 25,000 in Building 1 when M.C. moved to Easy Street.

## *Larger Facility for Royal Plastic Division*

In a similar vein, although no one predicted it, on June 8, 1989, our Royal Plastic Division in Minden, Nebraska, broke ground for a 24,000 square foot plant, more than half again the size of their existing facility. The decision to construct a new plant had been made sometime before but the timing was necessitated by Royal's receiving a six-figure contract from Kelly AFB in San Antonio, Texas—at that time the largest in Royal's history, but since exceeded.

## *Greater Efficiency for Space-Flex Division*

As predicted in 1985, our Space-Flex Division moved into the El Monte facilities in December of last year and will occupy part of Building 6 when it is completed. The move,

long anticipated, effects many economies of scale including production, quality control, shipping, raw materials purchasing and warehousing, thereby allowing us to serve our customers in a vastly improved and more efficient manner.

## *Three-Fold Sales Increase*

Dollar sales volume has almost *tripled* in the last five years! Much of the increase can be attributed to gains in sales to airframe manufacturers such as Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, Embraer and British Aerospace. The company has realized better than a four-fold increase in sales to foreign customers, and has almost doubled sales to our domestic customers. M.C. did miss one prediction. He set a goal of "possibly tripling the present dollar volume in the sandwich panel business." We exceeded that by an additional 30 percent.

## *Significant "Burn-Through" Progress*

Since 1985 an increasing amount of emphasis on products with burn-through resistance, low smoke and toxic emission characteristics has been generated by every segment of the aircraft industry. The FAA, airframe manufacturers and airlines and component suppliers such as M.C. Gill Corp. are driven to develop new products to improve existing ones that incorporate these characteristics in their construction. For example, since the testing procedure and the ensuing results for burn-through qualification (a Federal Airworthiness Regulation) suppliers, manufacturers and airline operators have striven not only to comply, but to exceed the rigid standards imposed by the FAA. The M.C. Gill Corp. is both pleased and proud that it has developed or improved *eight* cargo liners that pass this test! We challenge any of our competitors to match that number. Thus, another of M.C.'s 1990 goals has been met or bettered.





### *More Research & Quality Control*

The successful achievement of the preceding goal required us to meet another of M.C.'s objectives because it couldn't have happened with the available personnel in Research, Development and Quality Assurance five years ago. There simply weren't enough people to get the job done. So we did what he asked—we doubled the staff in those two critical areas, going from 14 to 28! Although the numbers and percentage increase may be impressive, mere numbers of bodies, in and of themselves, don't mean a thing. However, we believe that, given our accomplishments, the personnel we've added in the last five years are among the most capable and experienced technicians, chemists, inspectors and engineers in the advanced composites industry today.

### *Upgraded Equipment*

In 1985, M.C. said we'd upgrade and increase capability and capacity of the equipment we had at that time. It's a fair bet that even he didn't realize the extent to which we would do so. In the five years since then, we have made major upgrades on four of our largest presses, from increasing the capacities of some by as much as six times to installing computer instrumentation control panels on others. Perhaps even more impressive is the new equipment we've added to the physical plant. Much of it is related to our aramid honeycomb production capacity, including an expander, printer, press, oven and horizontal band saw. The other additions are too numerous to mention here but needless to say, our capacity and capabilities have expanded to an extent undreamed of just five short years ago.

We're proud of our accomplishments and it would be nice to rest on our laurels, but a look at M.C.'s goals for the next five years indicates that he's not...and it's a sure bet the rest of us won't either!

# The Next Five Years

BY M.C. GILL  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Any prediction of the future presupposes a broad general plan, some of which may or may not come to pass. Despite the fact that during the next five years my activity and influence will be diminished, I have every confidence that the Company will continue to flourish under the capable guidance of my sons, Stephen and Phillip, and the rest of the management team.

- I feel to remain competitive and maintain our ranking, more vertical integration will be necessary. The shortest route to this goal would be to acquire smaller companies who are already expert in functions we will require.
- Some part and perhaps a great deal of the operation will be moved out of Southern California because of increasing environmental constraints on manufacturing. I'd venture that by 1995 we will be on the threshold of consolidating most operations into one giant building, in an area compatible with manufacturing composites.
- Our Research and Development department should double in size. As a result, at least one or two proprietary fabricated parts will be introduced and achieve, at worst, a modest degree of success. Also, new polyester-like resins will be developed which will approach phenolics in that smoke emissions will be significantly reduced. And our phenolic resins will be modified to achieve improved puncture resistance and ease of processing.
- Our processes will be improved markedly to lower costs and to improve uniformity of quality.
- The contoured products part of our business will grow at an even faster rate than our flat stock products.
- I see greater maturity and continuity in our operations—long runs will be more common and short run, fast delivery items could well be manufactured at a specialized, yet smaller facility.
- We should see the professorial chair in composite materials, sponsored by our corporation, filled and under full steam by 1995 at the University of Southern California.
- The company will remain family-owned and at least double its sales volume by 1995; this should keep it the leader in its field. Stephen and Phillip Gill will be carrying a much larger portion of the responsibilities.

It will be a challenge to keep pace with the growth of composites in commercial aviation. We shall try real hard! And, we expect to succeed!



## FUNNY SIDE

"You will have to pay full fare for that child, lady," said the bus driver. "He is over 12." "How can he be over 12, when I have only been married 10 years," she asked. "Lady, I just collect fares, not confessions," replied the driver.

★ ★ ★

Sign in the window of a shoe repair shop: "We bring back departed soles."

★ ★ ★

Sign in the window of a clock repair shop: "If your grandfather needs oiling and adjusting, we make house calls."

★ ★ ★

Sign in a jewelry store window: "Diamonds — plain and fiancée."

★ ★ ★

Graffiti on a building wall: "Legalize mental telepathy," and just below it: "I knew you were going to say that."

★ ★ ★

Keeping up with the Jones' is not nearly as dangerous as trying to pass them on a hill.

★ ★ ★

Experience is a hard teacher. She gives you the test first and the lesson later.

★ ★ ★

Two farmers were forever trying to outdo each other. One morning, the first one told his son, "Go over to the Johnsons place and borrow his crosscut saw. Tell him I want to cut up a pumpkin." Returning empty handed, the boy said, "Mr. Johnson said he can't let you have the saw until this afternoon. He's only half way through a potato."

## PEANUT TRIVIA

In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the invention of peanut butter, the following amazing facts are submitted. We hope they don't give you arachibutyrophobia. Arachibutyrophobia is the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth.

★ ★ ★

The peanut originated in South America about 3,500 years ago. It was introduced into Africa in the 18th century where it was adopted as a staple crop and called "goobers."

★ ★ ★

George Washington Carver developed more than 300 products from the peanut, including cosmetics, medicine, ink, wall-board and glue. He also invented peanut brittle.

★ ★ ★

Peanut butter is the number one sandwich spread in the U.S.

★ ★ ★

Americans eat enough peanut butter each year to completely cover the entire floor of the Grand Canyon.

★ ★ ★

A fried peanut butter and banana sandwich was Elvis Presley's favorite snack.

★ ★ ★

Thomas Jefferson grew peanuts on his farm at Monticello.

★ ★ ★

Finally, the peanut is not a nut but a legume, the same family of vegetables as peas.

## NEWS FLASH!

The M.C. Gill Corp. now has available the new cargo liner repair patch kit. It is qualified to FAR 25.855 (a-1), Appendix F, Part III, Amendment 25-60. It has been approved for use in both Boeing, McDonnell Douglas and all other commercial aircraft. The kits can be ordered either with or without rivets.