

*"This company is Mrs. Grossman's. Always has been, always will be."*

**JASON GROSSMAN**, president of Petaluma-based Mrs. Grossman's Paper Co.

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT  
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

# Business

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CHRISTOPHER CHUNG / The Press Democrat

Jason Grossman, who has worked at Mrs. Grossman's Paper Co. for two decades, has taken the reins of the Petaluma sticker maker. His mother, company founder Andrea Grossman, has retired after nearly 30 years.

## Sticker empire's evolution

After nearly 30 years in Petaluma, Mrs. Grossman's founder calls it quits and passes torch to son

By **RAYNE WOLFE**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Nearly 30 years ago Andrea Grossman founded a sticker company that sold simple red hearts on wheels of waxy perforated sheets. It was a new concept at the time and perhaps a bit risky.

To create lovely little embellishments to express affection and a sense of fun and expect others to pay for them — could it work?

After selling millions upon millions of those hearts plus bushels of other sticker designs, Grossman is embarking on another ad-



**Andrea Grossman**

venture — her own quiet retirement. Last month, Grossman named her son, Jason Grossman, 45, president of Mrs. Grossman's Paper Co.

No sharp turns in the business model are planned, said Jason Grossman, who has worked at the Petaluma company for two decades.

It's hardly a shake-up. The transition has been in the works for the past two years, Jason Grossman said, and will allow his mother more time to concentrate on her passions.

"We will not become Mr. Grossman's. No way. Not Mrs. Grossman & Son. This company is Mrs. Grossman's. Always has been, always will be," he said.

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### COMPANY PROFILE

**Company:** Mrs. Grossman's Paper Co.

**Headquarters:** Petaluma

**President:** Jason Grossman

**Employees:** 90

**Sales:** 450 million to 500 million stickers annually

# GROSSMAN: Company selling 500 million stickers a year

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Mrs. Grossman's began in 1979, atop Andrea Grossman's own dining room table. A graphic designer and single-mom raising a son, she took a gamble on the power of her own designs.

The company now sells 450 million to 500 million stickers annually, down from just more than 600 million in 2004. As sales have slipped, the company has reduced staff from 150 in 2004 to about 90 today.

"Like a lot of companies we are facing lots of competition. When others print in China producing something for 10 cents that might cost us \$10 to produce, you have to operate lean," said Jason Grossman.

Despite the challenge posed by low-cost competitors and venture-backed giants, Mrs. Grossman's is still a dominant force in the sticker, scrapbook and craft markets.

"Some of the larger players, those bought by venture capital companies, have become huge, but compared to our competitors, we are in the top 10 percent," said Jason Grossman.

To hedge against any softness in sticker sales, Jason Grossman has diversified the privately held family business.

In 1998, he launched a subsidiary, Paragon Label, to produce labels for the wine industry. The 110,000-square-foot corporate headquarters includes its own in-house printing plant.

"They laughed when I started. 'Oh please! They print kiddie stickers!' That's what our competition said at the time," Jason Grossman said.

Today, Paragon provides labels to wineries, including several lines for Francis Ford Coppola, Don Sebastiani & Sons, B.R. Cohn, Iron Horse and others. Grossman credits the creative synergy of working with wine label clients such as filmmaker and vintner Coppola as the key to racking up an armful of national printing awards.

Paragon wine labels are artistic meditations on the joy of good wine. They often utilize laser cutting and intricate die cuts. The labels must not only look good, but must be tough enough to survive crate shipping and occasional chilling dunks in ice buckets.

"I love wine labels because they are so much more than just a label. The label is more important than the bottle, the foil. The label draws the person in," Jason Grossman said.

Despite Paragon's growth,

the company is best known for its stickers. Every year, 30,000 people tour its headquarters and printing plant. While tour traffic has declined as the economy has slowed — the Petaluma sticker factory drew 60,000 visitors at its peak in 2004 — Mrs. Grossman's remains a regular stop on school field trips, and it draws both vacationers and passionate scrapbook crafters. The company also welcomes artists and art teachers for creativity workshops.

Along the way, Mrs. Grossman's built a reputation for quirkiness, including allowing employees to bring well-socialized dogs to work. And why not? After all, Chip, a Pomeranian with attitude, is never far from Jason Grossman's heels.

The company is also known for its commitment to employing developmentally disabled workers, providing a sheltered workshop in its assembly department in a partnership with North Bay Industries.

Andrea Grossman's retirement from daily operations will allow her more time to concentrate on her passions.

As founder and lead graphic artist, she will continue to be involved with design and product development teams.

She is active with Prison Fellowship, a nonprofit Christian ministry that strives to rehabilitate prisoners. As part of Prison Fellowship, Andrea Grossman visits inmates at various locations. For her, what started with one heart will end the same way.

"I see this as an opportunity for me to be more involved in causes that really touch my heart," she said.

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## Local stockwatch

These stocks of banks and other small companies are often traded on a "work-out" basis, meaning the actual price may vary slightly.

Company	Last	Bid	Ask
Amer. River Hold.	10.50	N/A	12.00
Bank of Marin	32.50	29.89	33.13
Enova Systems Inc.	2.01		
Exchange Bank	70.01	70.00	74.00
Mendo. Brew Inc.	0.55	0.35	0.75
Son. Valley Bank	19.10	19.10	21.00
Son. West Holding	8.25	N/A	N/A
Spectrum Organ.	0.70	N/A	N/A
Sterling Finan. Corp.	13.50	13.51	14.50
Summit State Bank	6.01	N/A	11.75
Zap	0.62	0.62	0.64