

## MOST INFLUENTIAL PHILATELISTS

THE SPECIAL EDITION FROM LINN'S STAMP NEWS RECOGNIZES THOSE WHO HAVE HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON PHILATELY OVER RECENT DECADES AND TELLS THE STORIES THAT HAVE IMPACTED THEM.

### Steve Malack

New York | Dealer



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Ups ... downs ... perseverance ... surprises ...

Steve Malack has experienced all of them in his working-for-a-living-taking-care-of-business life as a family man and stamp dealer.

"I never wanted to work for somebody else or wear a uniform or costume," Malack said to sum up his 35 years in the profession. "You can set your own hours, which is nice ... if you can make it."

Making it often means working 60 to 70 hours in a week, and that's if you're not heading off for a weekend stamp show. Days involve everything from reviewing customers' want lists and mailing out orders to answering phone calls and emails, organizing stock and updating the business website.

"There is no typical day. Every day is different," said Malack, who stays realistic and knows how to pivot.

Malack specializes in United States stamps and sells coins, too. He's been in business since he was a teenager growing up in his middle-American hometown of Endicott, N.Y., near Binghamton, where he still resides. His story in sales starts much earlier, though.

"Well, yeah," Malack confesses. "I used to sell all sorts of stuff from my school desk in the third grade. I put signs all over my desk with advertising. My teachers didn't really like that. I sold golf balls, candy, gum ..." But he soon discovered that selling stamps was more lucrative than selling gum and used golf balls.

Why dealing and not collecting? "I like money, to be truthful," Malack said with a hearty laugh.

Malack attended State University of New York at Binghamton and graduated in 1991 with degrees in business and computer science. He attended classes during the day and worked third shift for IBM, which had its roots in Endicott.

Like most dealers, Malack started out by doing mail order and traveling to shows.

He built a good reputation. When he was still a teenager, one of his clients sought him out with a surprise. Malack and his family were vacationing on Long Island. A client, who lived in Connecticut, made his way by boat to the beach where the Malacks were swimming and sunning.

"I swam out to the boat," Malack said. "He gave me a couple of bluefish that we had for dinner."

Malack, like most dealers, spent several years hauling stock to shows. "I always liked stamp shows because we dealt directly with our customers," Malack said. "I could teach and educate customers on what to look for and how to buy. It was like having family in every city."

Surprises come in all shades, Malack said.

"At one show, a client walked in, handed me a large check and said 'I want this stamp,' " Malack recalled. The man pointed at a rare printing of the black U.S. 2¢ Harding, a perf. 11 (Scott 613) that currently has a catalog value of about \$37,000. "He was gone in a minute. I was blindsided."

Malack found the stamp in a couple of weeks. He found that client had written the blind-faith check so large that the man received a \$5,000 refund.

Things changed considerably, though, when Malack got divorced and found himself as the main caregiver to his three children — then

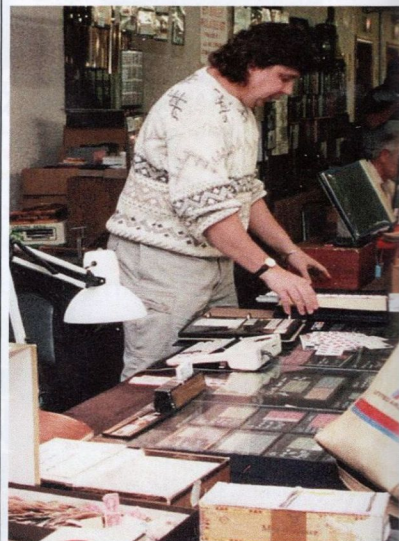
ages 8, 11 and 13. "I just couldn't do shows anymore," said Malack, who reshuffled his business so he could coach sports, help with homework and attend cheerleading events.

Mail order and the internet became Malack's permanent venue. His experience at IBM helped. "I knew a lot of computer tricks and secrets," he said. "My schooling helped me out a lot."

Today, his three children — and sometimes his 7-year-old granddaughter, Sophia — help him out. "They are putting in more hours and have been trained and educated as to how to treat our customers, accurately grade stamps and handle the difficult issues with everyday business problems."

So, is retirement near?

"You never really retire from this industry," said Malack, as he went back to packing up some orders to be shipped. "I guess it's a disease." ♦



Steve Malack hasn't sold at stamp shows for a dozen years, but has pleasant memories of visiting with customers at shows throughout the Northeast.