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The man behind the font

Who gets to see his writing on Pampers boxes?

By **KEN TRAINOR**

Andy Mead is a font. No, not a font of information, though apparently he's that, too, when it comes to music. But he's also a computer font—at any rate his handwriting is. Like Times Roman, Garamond, Arial, Courier, Verdana.

"You know how you fall in love with a font?" asks Val Camilletti, Andy's mentor and cheerleader.

Uhhhhhhh ... not exactly. "There's hundreds of them. Who thinks it's a real human being's handwriting?"

Well, Andy is a real human being. Andy is also a font, which used to be called "Mead" until the paper company threatened to sue. Now it's just "Andy."

The person Andy was manager at Val's halla Records for 10 years. "He is a walking encyclopedia of music," attests Val. One of his duties was making all the signs in the shop. Somewhere along the line, in high school he thinks, he stopped "scripting" and started printing. That happens with lefties, who often rebel against the left-brained, right-handed, cursive world.

One day back in 1993, his buddy and fellow OPRF grad Steve Matteson (class of '85), a type designer for Agfa Monotype, was visiting him in the store, saw his signs and asked for a sample.

Matteson used Andy Mead's handwriting to produce Mead, which became Andy. Microsoft eventually absorbed it. Steve even cut Andy in on the royalties. He didn't make a lot of money, "but I did pretty well for the time I invested, which was about 10 minutes," Andy says.

The first place he spotted his own handwriting was on big Dunkin' Donuts banners when they were introducing bagels in the mid-'90s. The banners read, "Now, bagels" in Mead.

"I tried so hard to get one of those banners," Camilletti recalled, "but they wouldn't sell."

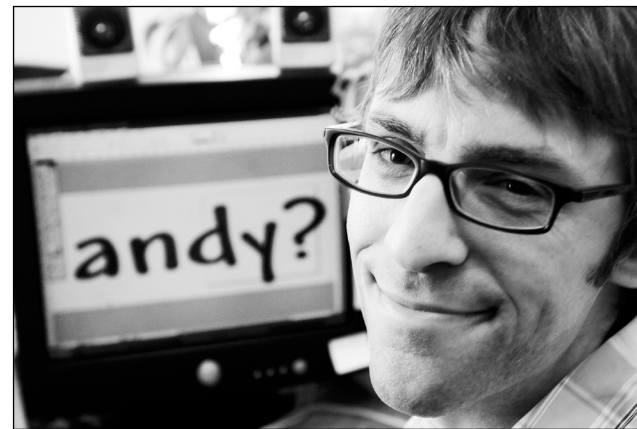


Photo by Josh Hawkins

FONT-ASTIC: Andy Mead can't escape his handwriting.

You can also find it on Pampers boxes, Andy adds, even on their TV commercials.

"I have it on my computer at home," says Camilletti. "I use it for everything. I love it."

Andy says his real handwriting is messier than Andy the font. He prefers messier. To create the font, they cleaned up his script and standardized it in a way that makes him feel a little uncomfortable. But it still looks human, which is what designers like. "The computer design community wants something organic, not made by a machine," he says.

It's popular enough so people in the field, when they meet him say, "Oh, that's you?" If they're not in the field, they say, "What's a font?"

"Those are the two most common responses," Andy says.

People like to talk about it when they find out, but Andy is pretty modest.

"Oh, he's impossible," says Camilletti. "We called him 'Font Boy' just to harass him. He can throw stuff together like anyone can do it. He belittles his efforts. He knows he's good at this. He has a natural eye for graphic arts."

In fact, Camilletti's former "right arm" now designs ads for Wednesday Journal.

"We have it right here," Andy says, "under Mead Bold and Andy, but I don't like to use it. I like things that look rougher."

Andy analyzed

We asked our resident handwriting expert, grapho-analyst Dr. Jim Murray (who has a column in our sister publication, the Forest Park Review), to take a crack at Andy Mead's script:

"This handwriting is really creative, original, personalized printing. It is symmetrical, rhythmic, and even beautiful. The writing is truly an art form in itself. Somebody could frame it, and hang it in a gallery, and it would be admired. The printing is thick. It was written with a magic marker or a felt tip pen because the writer could not get the same effect with pen or pencil. We call this thick writing pasty. It is also upright, legible, and has a wavy or uneven baseline.

"This writer uses no upper or lower loops so we know he is practical, realistic, determined, strong-willed, and has a well balanced outlook

crossing the lazy creek, i spotted a creepy fox... my son, being 7, loves 'dem critters... when i ask him what he wants to be when he "grows up", he replies, "i want to work in the forest with the animals!"

on life. He is also independent (disregards traditional rules of capitalization), opinionated, doesn't accept criticism well and likes having things his own way. He is cautious and has a strong sense of self-preservation.

"The writer has the soul of an artist and could excel in one or more art form like painting, sculpture, design, music, dance, or writing. He is creative, original, organized, ambitious, sensual, impressionable, sensitive, and is influenced by color, music, food, sex, and other things associated with 'the good life.' The writer is warm, has a sense of humor, and a capacity of enjoyment and an appreciation for life."

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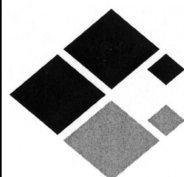
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