

# Business

**R**ichard Newcombe looks a little lonely sitting in the ocean-view office of his Marina del Rey based media empire, Creators Syndicate.

His desk is neat and clean, devoid of papers. Phones are not ringing off the hook. His secretary is not buzzing him every three minutes with important messages.

One wonders, in fact, just what it is that he does that causes him to be touted as one of the most brilliant media moguls of the day.

At age 45, Newcombe is highly successful in a business which is very public, yet hidden.

"A lot of people don't understand what we do," he admits. The Brentwood resident is on a first-name basis with some of the most famous and controversial people in the world.

He has worked closely with Ann Landers and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Not to mention Molly Ivins, Joyce Jillson,

Thomas Sowell, Dan Quayle, and Alexander Cockburn.

He knows some of the funniest people in the country, cartoonists like Herblock and Johnny Hart, of "B.C." and



"Wizard of Id" fame.

All are under the wing of his Creators Syndicate, the fifth largest syndication group in the nation. He is the man behind the names.

"It's a fun business," he said. "We look for writers and artists who we think have the potential to make newspapers more interesting."

Over a 20-year career in the mysterious world of syndication, he has learned from, and locked horns with, media moguls Rupert Murdoch and the late Robert Maxwell. From Murdoch, whom he calls "a genius," he says he learned to take risks.

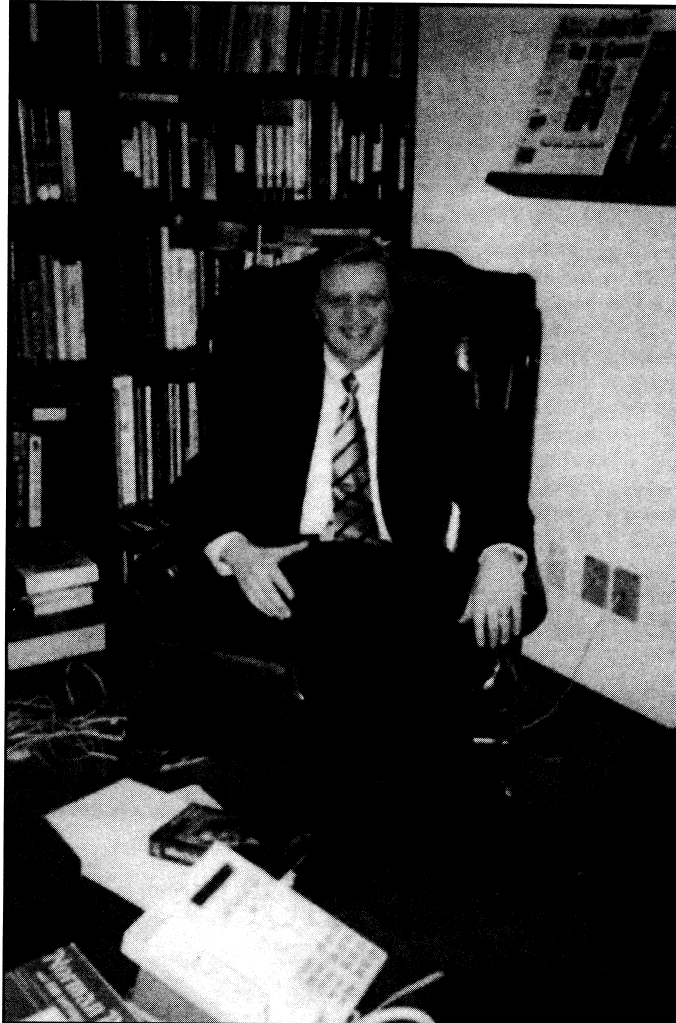
His motto: "Expect to Win."

Founded in 1987, Creators created an instant sensation by wooing some of the biggest names, including Ann Landers—the most widely syndicated columnist in the world—away from their former "homes."

Starting out with a desk and a phone in a small Westwood office, Creators soon was on its way to becoming the fastest-growing syndicate in the country. Newcombe now has 80 columnists and cartoonists under his wing, among them Pulitzer Prize winners.

He did it the old-fashioned way: salesmanship. Newcombe offered them something they weren't getting from their old syndicates—ownership of their names and any products produced from them.

Along the way, he single-handedly altered the landscape for creative people, who formerly had been virtual vassals, made to sign over all rights to their names and the products of their minds in long-term,



manager for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate.

Moving to Los Angeles in 1978, he increased sales more in one year than in the syndicate's seven previous years. His name was made, and, at the age of 28, he says, he "felt like a young Turk." His biggest score at the LA Times Syndicate was when he convinced Erma Bombeck to move there.

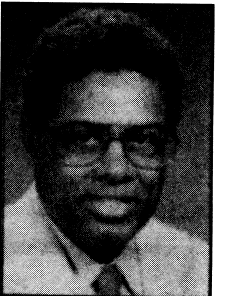


Hillary Rodham Clinton

"She was with Rupert Murdoch, so he flew me to New York and offered to triple my salary," Newcombe recalls. Naturally, he took the offer, and spent several years at Murdoch's News America Syndicate.

Then Murdoch sold out to Hearst, which owns the number one syndicate, King Features.

Instead of staying on the corporate treadmill, he



Thomas Sowell

decided to go out on his own. "I always wanted my own business, and it was the go-go '80s, when money was flowing freely," he said. One of his prime investors was the flamboyant Robert Maxwell—Murdoch's nemesis—who died in a mysterious boating accident some years later.

Things seem to have calmed down considerably for Newcombe since then.

He recently scored another major coup, signing First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton as a weekly columnist. Clinton thereby became the first First Lady to write a regular column since Eleanor Roosevelt, with whom she is frequently compared.

Again, salesmanship and persuasion was key. "She looked at eight syndicates and chose us," he said.

Newcombe is ecumenical, purveying the wares of a wide range of writers, from the ultra-Conservative African-American scholar Thomas Sowell (Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' mentor) to the left-wing Alexander Cockburn.

Although he seeks the controversial, Newcombe steers away from writers who, in his opinion, go over the edge. "(Lewis) Farrakhan and Howard Stern both have enormous followings, but they have too much baggage," he said.

From his vantage point, newspapers are still important, despite their losses in the high-tech information age. "We are seeing a shift," he said. "Daily circulation will fall, but the readers will be very desirable (to advertisers)."

## Wordsmith

In the Marketplace of Ideas, Richard Newcombe Is the Master Salesman

BY CYNTHIA FRAZIER - MANAGING EDITOR

draconian contracts.

A former journalist himself, Newcombe earned his news stripes as a UPI reporter and editor, but he had an early introduction to the business of newspapers because his father was a CPA for Chicago newspapers. He has written advertising copy, and was editor of his college newspaper, the Georgetown Voice.

After graduating from Georgetown University with a degree in history, he enrolled in an MBA program, but dropped out because he "missed journalism."

A stint in graduate school working for a management training consultant put him in the right place at the right time to join the National Newspaper Syndicate, and from there he was hired as sales