

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Contact: Jason Anzalone
Kerusso
P.O. Box 32
Berryville, AR 72616
800-424-0943

20-year trendsetter lets message do the talking

BERRYVILLE, Arkansas, July 6, 2007—Many young entrepreneurs dream of starting their own business, but a lack of funds, vision or commitment often force them to abandon their goals and settle for a less than exciting career choice.

Vic Kennett was one of the lucky ones. In 1987, the 23-year-old worked in the construction trade in his hometown of Eureka, Arkansas. Kennett had accepted Christ a year earlier and had noticed people wearing T-shirts with Christian messages and scriptures. One day while scraping tile off a restroom floor, he thought out loud, "I could make T-shirts like that."

So with a \$1,000 family loan and three shirt designs he placed an ad in *Campus Life* magazine and began a mail order business called Kerusso, a Greek work that means "to proclaim the gospel." He'd check for orders during his lunch break and when he had enough orders he'd take them to a local screen printer to print. Barely breaking even on this approach, he almost quit but was encouraged by his sister not to give up.

He decided wholesale might be a better route and took two days off of work to visit area Christian bookstores and found they wanted what he had to sell. He added a few more designs and found a regional sales group to carry his designs to the Christian market.

One of Kerusso's first customers, Lyn Adams of Joy Unlimited of Vienna, Virginia, said T-shirts were a new thing in Christian bookstores in 1987 and when she got her first Kerusso flyer she thought "they were the best things I had ever seen" and went on to sell thousands of Kerusso tees.

The Kennett home became a factory for Kennett to print his shirts using a tabletop press and a hairdryer set up in the backroom of his home—a choice he made after vowing not to go in debt for Kerusso. After signing with a national sales group increased his orders, he was able to quit his job and concentrate on Kerusso full-time.

"I hung up my hammer and picked up a squeegee," he said. "When I became a Christian I felt personally responsible for the Great Commission."

When the Kennett house got too crowded for man and machine, Kerusso rented a nearby building and hired its first employee. Within a couple of years, Kennett purchased the entire 30,000 square foot facility to keep up with the 50-100% annual growth Kerusso was experiencing.

In 1995, Kerusso had outgrown that facility and a 6,000-square-foot warehouse and offices were built at the current location in the Industrial Park in Berryville. Since then five additions to the building have been made and two additional building have been purchased—one that houses a fitness center for the more than 110 employees. Today the Kerusso campus fills 80,000-square-feet, including an in-house printing facility, which is responsible for the production of 1 million shirts a year.

Becoming a leader

Kerusso came into the CBA market a year behind another apparel leader, Living Epistles, and Solid Light a few years later. Of the "big three" Christian apparel companies, Kerusso is the only one still under concurrent ownership.

The company appeared at its first CBA in Anaheim in 1995 with a 10-by-10 foot gridwall. Kerusso's creativity has carried over into their trade show exhibits. Today, show shoppers can recognize Kerusso's four linear booths from practically anywhere on the trade floor. The 20-by-30 foot aluminum island is constructed using lights, plexiglass and wood.

In 1998, Kerusso made an effort to broaden its offering into gifts with leather bookmarks and floating action pens. Seeing it as a "worthwhile category," the product development team has added jewelry and accessories, tools and an underserved category in the Christian market: toys.

In the last two years, Kerusso has tackled a task retailers often struggle with: merchandising apparel and gifts in tight spaces. Stores that use the Light House Apparel Center report a 330% increase in T-shirt sales by displaying 240 T-shirts in 4 square feet of space. The new **Beacon™ Accessory Center** is expected to do the same for jewelry and accessories in less than 1 ½ square feet of space.

"T-shirts are our backbone," Kennett said. "I believe in everything we do, but a shirt is so evangelical, probably more than any product—not just in our line, but in any line. It is so public and it is large enough to say something. It's a large canvas."

Fabric of faith

"One of the great benefits of having been in business for nearly 20 years is that we have been blessed and inspired to receive comments from our buyers," Kennett said. "We hear stories of T-shirts opening the door for conversations, of Promise Rings offering comfort and of children in the poorest countries on earth being helped by receiving a share of profits on our wristband sales. Occasionally we even hear of someone accepting Christ. It's these kind of stories that made our work a joy."

In 2006 and 2007, *Impressions* magazine, the leading screen printing journal, ranked Kerusso #35 on its nationally recognized list of top volume screen printers. The Christian industry has recognized Kerusso with top awards like the Retailers Choice Award and CBA's Impact Awards for best booth design. During the last two years Kerusso was the focus of media attention by ABC News, Fox News, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The Atlanta Journal Constitution.

Kerusso has always been a giving company, strongly committed to the principal of tithing. After the events of September 11, 2001, Kerusso was able to give \$20,000 dollars to the Red Cross and Salvation Army 9/11 relief funds. Kerusso has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars, and thousands of T-shirts to churches, boys & girl's ranches, women's shelters, disaster groups, and other charities nationwide. Most recently, Kerusso has partnered with Compassion International to raise \$500,000 through the "Red Wristband" product. To date, they have sold more than 1.3 wristbands and donated over \$250,000 to the project.

"From the beginning my mission has been to simply do my best to obey Jesus when he said, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,'" Kennett said. "Kerusso products are distributed in more than 5,000 retail stores worldwide. Over the years we have placed over 7 million garments bearing messages that challenge and encourage people to seek to know the God of the universe through His Son Jesus."

Licensing partnerships have included Max Lucado, Women of Faith and Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez*.

Impressions magazine has said that a graphic T-shirt will be read as many as 3,000 times in its existence.

"That seems kind of high to me," Kennett said. "Maybe it's only 2,000 or 1,000 times. Even if every one of our shirts were seen and read by only 100 people each, then we've helped to preach the Gospel 700 million times."

For more information, contact Kerusso at 1-800-424-0943 or visit www.kerusso.com.

About Kerusso: Founded by President Vic Kennett in 1987, Kerusso occupies 65,000 square feet of office, design, and manufacturing facilities in Northwest Arkansas. The company is the world's leading designer and producer of Christian-themed apparel and continues to grow and expand their product offerings that include jewelry, gifts and accessories. More information is available at Kerusso's website, www.kerusso.com, or by calling 1-800-424-0943.