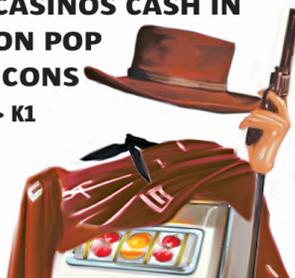


**Pacific NW**  
**KING OF KITSCH**  
**AT ARCHIE MCPHEE**



**Entertainment**  
**CASINOS CASH IN**  
**ON POP**  
**ICONS**  
**> K1**



**Travel: Asia**  
**LAID-BACK LAOS;**  
**FINDING DEALS > L1**



**Books**  
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**READS IN 2004 > K10**



**Volleyball**  
**UW WINS, HEADS**  
**TO FINAL FOUR > C1**



The Seattle Times  
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DECEMBER 12, 2004  
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SPORTS  
 TICKER

**Payton scores 21 to help Celtics shut down Sonics**

**Shifting Fortunes** |  
 Pain and gain in the global economy

**Inventor rose high – until world changed**

**SEATTLE TIMES SPECIAL REPORT** |  
 In post-WWII America, big government protected big business from foreign competition and left maverick entrepreneurs to fend for themselves. But the economic rules soon changed. Today and tomorrow, we track the history of globalization through the rise and fall of a local inventor's wealth.

BY ALWYN SCOTT  
 Seattle Times business reporter

PACIFIC – Harry Rasmussen climbs aboard a forklift, fires up the propane engine and spins into position.

For the past hour, this slight, white-haired man has crouched, kneeled and measured to prepare for this moment.

In a sense, he's been preparing his entire 74-year life.

Finally he's ready to heft hundred of pounds of intricate machinery onto an old flatbed trailer hitched to his pale-blue Econoline van.

The machine is one of several that made Rasmussen a millionaire many times over, allowing him to buy a sleek red Maserati and numerous airplanes.

Built by hand 30 years ago, the machine was a fixture in Rasmussen's factory a few miles away that churned out telephones, phone jacks and other widgets sold around the world.

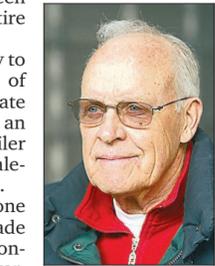
The factory is gone, its 120 employees scattered to other jobs.

Rasmussen has lost most of his wealth. And the machine, which still works perfectly, is on its way to the scrap yard.

This is a story about a guy with a genius for inventing useful gadgets and his experience as America deregulated and globalized over the past 30 years.

His story stretches from the "glory days" of Ma Bell's monopoly through the free-wheeling dot-com era, where his latest product was born.

It is emblematic of thousands of entrepreneurs who form a backbone of the U.S. economy. Tinkering in garages, setting up



Inventor Harry Rasmussen operated Crest Industries in Pacific.

**PART TWO: Changing rules and changing fortunes**  
**> Tomorrow in The Times**

**Governor recount**

Before the hand recount, Republican Dino Rossi was leading Democrat Christine Gregoire by 42 votes. Here's how many new votes each has gathered so far:



Gregoire **+108**



Rossi **+136**

**RECOUNT TAKES** political campaigns into overtime **> B1**

**Looks like it's Willingham for Huskies' football coach**



Tyrone Willingham

**SOURCE SAYS ANNOUNCEMENT COMING**

**Controversial firing ended Notre Dame tenure**

BY BLAINE NEWNHAM AND BUD WITHERS  
 Seattle Times staff reporters

Intent on resurfacing as a national football power, the University of Washington is expected to announce the hiring of former

Notre Dame coach Tyrone Willingham early this week, a source told The Seattle Times yesterday. Willingham, who led Stanford to a Rose Bowl in 1999 before coaching three years at Notre Dame, would replace Keith Gil-

bertson and become Washington's third head football coach in four years.

In landing Willingham, the Huskies would hire a coach known to have an impeccable reputation with the NCAA, a strong approach to discipline and a hands-off attitude in allowing his

assistant coaches leeway. Details of the hire, such as length of contract and salary, were unavailable.

Late Friday, Boston College coach Tom O'Brien withdrew his candidacy after Washington failed to make him an offer within

Please see **> WILLINGHAM, A30**

**RIGHT COACH?** Time will tell **> Blaine Newnam, C1**  
**HEISMAN** goes to USC's Matt Leinart **> Sports, C1**

**Tribe's letter deepens dilemma over project**



STEVE RINGMAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

State Secretary of Transportation Doug MacDonald confers with Frances Charles, chairwoman of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, outside a meeting of state and tribal officials last week. Construction near Port Angeles of a dry dock related to the Hood Canal Bridge project has uncovered tribal burial grounds and remnants of Tse-whit-zen, an ancient Klallam village. The tribe has asked that the project be moved, saying further destruction seems unavoidable.

**KLALLAM WANT SACRED LAND SPARED**

**HOOD CANAL BRIDGE** | The state has spent \$50 million on a dry-dock project, but it is likely to abandon the site after discovery of ancient tribal artifacts and remains.

BY LYNDIA V. MAPES  
 Seattle Times staff reporter

The Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe has asked the state Department of Transportation to find a new location for a marine facility now being built in Port Angeles, making it increasingly likely that the state will have to stop construction after spending more than \$50 million.

In a letter sent Friday to the state, the tribe requested that the state move the project from the Port Angeles site, where remains of hundreds of the tribe's ancestors and remnants of an ancient Klallam village were inadvertently unearthed, because further construction would disturb more graves and destroy more of the tribe's cultural heritage.

"It would be most difficult to continue the project with their opposition," Gov. Gary Locke said Friday.

In addition, Locke said, "It is really unfortunate that so much money has been spent on the project." Please see **> TRIBE, A22**



Mary Anne Thomas, far right, carries a candle as, from left, tribal members Michael Q. Langland, Otto Ditlefsen and Alex Stevenson carry remains of their ancestors from the construction site.

**FORECAST**  
 Partly cloudy and breezy. High 55, low 36. **> LOCAL B6**

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# Shifting Fortunes

## Pain and gain in the global economy

As a line technician at Pacific Northwest Bell, Harry Rasmussen saw inefficiency everywhere. He built a device that enabled one person to find a faulty connection that an eight-man crew typically took days to find. He asked Bell to manufacture the testers so other crews could use them. Bell refused.

### < Economy

FROM A1

#### INVENTOR ROSE HIGH

#### Phone devices brought fortune

small offices or building modest factories, they employ half of the private U.S. work force and produce nearly half of the nation's output. Yet they are often overlooked in analyses of the economy and outsourcing, with the focus on companies that span the globe.

Over the past few decades, they have shared in the same economic history. But for many, the outcome was different. Instead of profiting, many found the globalized world a difficult place, where their survival, like Rasmussen's, depends on reinventing themselves with technology and adapting to a sea change in business rules.

#### Tail fins and faith

*Corporate America in the 1950s had little place for risk-takers.*

To understand one small company's place in the changing global economy, and how it

got there, we must set aside modern-day notions about business, and travel back to the 1950s.

It was an age when chrome and tail fins reflected growing middle-class wealth, an age before foreign automakers challenged Detroit, before radios and televisions came mainly from Japan and Korea or clothing from China and Mexico. Latte had not entered our lexicon, and American industry stood widely emulated and largely unrivaled around the world.

The '50s also were an age of bureaucracy, a holdover from World War II, when government planners kept a tight grip on the economy, dictating how much weaponry factories churned out, setting consumer prices and rationing essentials such as gasoline, tires, sugar and meat.

It is hard to recall today, but America's faith in big government and big corporations was once so strong that in 1944, the U.S. joined 43 other countries to set up forerunners of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to rebuild war-torn Europe, stabilize exchange rates and promote trade.

Despite our historic love for rugged individuals, we spent the 1940s and 1950s shunning maverick entrepreneurs in favor of the comfortable, unquestioning "Organization Man," as William Whyte put it in his 1956 book of that title.

"In those days innovation and creative genius were not what corporations were looking for," Rieva Lesonsky, author and editorial director of Entrepreneur magazine, said in an interview.

Big was beautiful, and companies "were turning out people to work in factories," she said. "If you thought outside the box, you would never get promoted."

By the 1970s economic stagnation would fracture these beliefs, setting off a revolution in economic policy. Under President Reagan, Congress cut taxes, deregulated business and fostered markets for everything from airfares to wages.

The changes tore down old bureaucracy and invigorated the economy, creating a climate in which young risk-takers such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs would spark the tech boom.

#### An invention spurred

*Ma Bell shows little patience for her innovative son.*

All of that was years away in 1950, when Rasmussen graduated from Puyallup High School and walked into the biggest corporate bureaucracy of the day: AT&T.

Bundled together from dozens of small phone companies, Ma Bell was the largest corporation in the world and a regulated monopoly. It owned the vaunted Bell Labs, which car-



Harry Rasmussen and his Maserati Bora, in 1989. At the pinnacle of his success, Rasmussen was a millionaire many times over.

FAMILY PHOTO

ried on high-level research; Western Electric, which made phones and equipment; and the entire phone system — down to the wires in your house and the phones it leased to you.

As a line technician at Pacific Northwest Bell, young Rasmussen saw inefficiency everywhere. An eight-man crew typically took days to find a faulty connection between Seattle and San Francisco. Rasmussen built a device that enabled one person to find the same fault in a day. He asked Bell to manufacture the testers so other crews could use them. Bell refused.

So Rasmussen found a Chicago company to make the devices, aiming to sell them to Bell and profit from his invention. Again Bell refused. "If we thought you'd need it, we'd make it," was the response, implying his innovation was an insult to Bell Labs, he says.

Bell offered \$500 for the rights to the invention. Rasmussen said "No thanks" — and went 15 years without a promotion.

His union brothers, meanwhile, called him disloyal for trying to make Bell more efficient. "I could see I was being hammered," he said. "It shows what bureaucracy does to you."

It was his first fight with corporate hierarchy but hardly his first tangle with authority stifling innovation.

His family's raspberry farm near Pacific had given Rasmussen room to explore business and inventions. As a teen during the war, he sold bicycles built from parts he pulled from the dump. He built a street rod before he had a driver's license, and a sports car he exhibited at the 1962 World's Fair. He invented a machine to cut tops off berry bushes, turning an ardu-



ELLEN M. BANNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Harry Rasmussen's factory in Pacific sold millions of these phone jacks to the Bell System, which put them in houses in the Pacific Northwest and throughout the country.

ous, monthlong job into a matter of a few days. Neighbors lined up to borrow it.

He credits laziness for his ideas: "I just wanted easier ways to do things." Lois, his wife of 34 years, credits his enormous brain: "Harry just knows everything."

At school, though, his maverick ways clashed with the authoritarian dictates of the day — just as they would at Bell. He dropped out of high school after a teacher hazed him mercilessly, calling him "stupid" in class, for having his own ideas. He finally graduated at 20 and says he didn't learn to read properly until 11th grade. But he was a quick study. When he took electronics his senior year, he read the textbook in two days.

Rasmussen never went to college. But a stint in the Army Signal Corps deepened his communications knowledge, exposing him to radar systems that he fixed when his more qualified bosses failed.

Later, at Pacific Northwest

Bell, a Seattle switchboard went down. For nearly a week, operators stood idle and calls couldn't get through. Rasmussen had been assigned to clean earwax from headsets, a punishment for the line-tester clash. But after others had failed to fix the switchboard problem, he asked someone to explain the layout of the system, which spanned several floors.

"When they came back from lunch, I had it working," he said.

#### Flourishing in a monopoly

*An end run around bureaucracy ends up in pay dirt.*

Amid Bell's bureaucracy, Rasmussen glimpsed a way for his innovation to thrive. In the late 1960s, new houses sprouting around Seattle were being wired for multiple phones.

Trouble was, Bell wouldn't install phone jacks until after houses sold and it could charge

for them. That left holes in the walls and dangling wires. Contractors complained it hampered home sales.

At work, Rasmussen sat in front of the person whose job it was to solve the problem. Hearing the details, Rasmussen sketched out a solution: a snap-on faceplate with a punch-out center. Contractors could cover up the holes while homes were on the market. After the new owners decided which rooms needed phones, Bell installers could put jacks into the same faceplates.

This time, Rasmussen didn't present his idea directly to Bell. He asked a plastics-molding company to make a prototype, then sent it to his colleague and signed the cover letter with his wife's maiden name. Lois made the stationery by hand with the rub-off letters that were popular before the arrival of desktop publishing.

Rasmussen was in the office when the package arrived. The others were incredulous: "How does this guy know exactly what we need?" The first order, for 30,000 faceplates, paid for the plastic mold. No one at Bell knew Rasmussen was behind it.

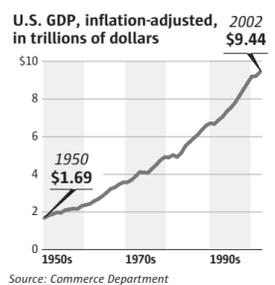
And so, in 1969, while still at Bell, Rasmussen leapt into business for himself. He borrowed \$850 through a friend at a credit union, asking him to "lose the paperwork for six months," so he could set up Crest Industries.

From faceplates and jacks, other ideas flowed quickly. He designed a small switch-box attachment to turn ringers off at extension phones, which were starting to crop up in middle-class homes. His design replaced Bell's brick-sized switch and would eventually sell more

Continued on next page >

#### A growing pie ...

Since market liberalization began around 1980, the U.S. has churned out 50 percent more wealth, as measured by gross domestic product, than in the 35 years after WWII. But the wealth hasn't been as evenly distributed among workers.



#### ... but a smaller slice of the world

While the U.S. economy has soared since the 1950s, its share of the world economy has shrunk as other countries have grown, helped by free trade and a liberalized global economy.



Note: Gross domestic product figures are adjusted for purchasing-power parity and inflation (1996 base). Data from earlier decades include fewer countries than later data but represent known GDP at that time.

Sources: Dallas Federal Reserve Bank and Alan Heston, Robert Summers and Bettina Aten, Penn World Table Version 6.1, Center for International Comparisons at the University of Pennsylvania.

## When big was beautiful

As the world recovers from war, government leaders come together to set economic policy and rebuild Europe. United in the belief that big governments and companies can best manage the economy and prevent wars, these institutions dominate the postwar period in the U.S. and Britain. By the late 1970s, high unemployment and inflation prompt a radical shift toward the free-market ideas of economists such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. President Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher turn these ideas into revolutions that remake their economies in a conservative mold. In Pacific, Wash., Harry Rasmussen starts making phone gadgets and prospers under the Bell System monopoly. But with the AT&T breakup in 1984, part of the economic transformation, his business encounters the forces of global competition and is nearly destroyed.

#### A changing world economy ...

- 1944** Friedrich von Hayek publishes "The Road to Serfdom," which said central planning damages market competition and can lead to totalitarianism. Widely distributed, it influenced Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.
- 1944-46** Delegates from 44 countries sign agreements at Bretton Woods, N.H., to manage the world economy, help finance reconstruction and alleviate poverty. These led to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Bank for International Settlements.
- 1948** General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade takes effect. It cuts tariffs and sets rules to encourage trade. Subsequent trade "rounds" in the 1960s and 70s further foster trade.

#### A local inventor's story ...

- 1950** Harry Rasmussen graduates from Puyallup High School at age 20. Goes to work for Pacific Northwest Bell, part of regulated monopoly AT&T, at that time the largest corporation in the world.
- 1955** Rasmussen invents device to test for faults on AT&T's long-distance telephone lines. AT&T refuses to let him manufacture the device for the company but offers to buy rights to it. Rasmussen refuses to sell.



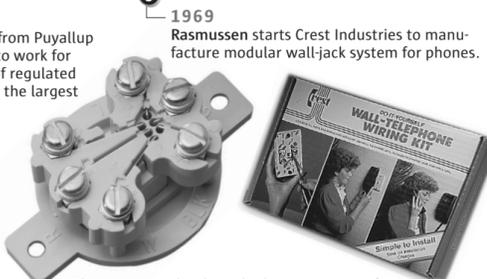
Phone operators in the 1940s worked at large switchboards.



Motorists in Ballard line up for appointments to buy gas as the OPEC oil embargo produces shortages in 1974.



**1964** Tax cuts proposed by President Kennedy are enacted in an effort to stimulate the economy.



The invention that launched a career: one of Rasmussen's phone jacks. He sold millions to the Bell System while he worked there. Bell had no idea the product came from an employee.

**1970** "The Economics of Regulation" is published by Alfred Kahn, examining deregulation and competition. He chairs the Civil Aeronautics Board in the late 1970s, where he pushes for airline deregulation.



**1980** Ronald Reagan elected; immediately begins work on tax cuts and further deregulation.

**1971** President Nixon, faced with rising inflation and unemployment, introduces price and wage controls and suspends the dollar from the gold standard.

**1973** Arab members of OPEC halt oil shipments to U.S. and Western Europe over support for Israel.

**1975** The term "supply-side economics" is coined by Jude Wanniski, a former Wall Street Journal editor.



**1978** President Carter begins deregulating U.S. airlines.

**1970** Rasmussen develops the "transfer key," a small switch to turn off phone ringers. He eventually sells 10 million, with a \$3 profit on each.



Transfer key

**1975-78** Rasmussen sells conversion kits that let standard Bell phones handle two lines. Sales soar and he buys the first of several airplanes.

**1979** Rasmussen, a millionaire many times over from his inventions, buys Maserati sports car on impulse during a trip to California. The car cost the equivalent of \$90,000 in today's dollars.



Harry Rasmussen with his wife, Lois, 1976.

ALDO CHAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Sources: Encyclopedias, Seattle Times photo library and research

Pain and gain in the global economy

**Shifting Fortunes**

< Continued from previous page

than 10 million. Rasmussen says he netted \$3 for every one.

Being inside the monopoly helped. He could thumb through staff directories of local Bell companies and send sales letters for his products to just the right people. Once, when Bell demanded a face-to-face meeting, he sent Lois' brother in his place.

Western Electric copied the switches and competed heavily for a long time. But Rasmussen's switches were more durable and kept selling.

In 1973, he quit Bell. Now a small-business man, he moved his factory from his garage to a larger space, where he built machines that could churn out thousands of jacks, faceplates and switches a day.

Life was good. In 1975, he bought a brand-new, \$225,000 Cessna 340 twin-engine plane — even before he had a pilot's license. On a trip to California, he spotted a red Maserati Bora at a dealership. The sleek car, a masterpiece of engineering, could top 164 miles per hour.

Rasmussen couldn't resist. After a test drive, he wrote a \$25,500 check, the equivalent of about \$90,000 today. When the dealer called his bank to see if the check was good, the banker didn't hesitate.

"Harry can buy the car or the dealership, whichever he prefers," the banker said.

**A big gamble in a shifting game**

*A thriving business runs smack into a new economy.*

While the Maserati and the airplane signaled Rasmussen's success, a bigger symbol stood atop a hill in Edgewood: a custom-built factory the size of a football field for his 120 employees.

Rasmussen was a generous boss. He doesn't mention it, but former employees recall the factory's professional kitchen, where Henry the Cook served up catfish, roast beef, chili and other specialties five days a week. A buck for tax paid for all you could eat.

There was a pool table and pingpong. And in contrast with today's rising health-care co-payments, Crest paid employee health premiums and more. "If insurance only paid 80 percent, the company would pay the difference or deductibles up to \$3,000 a year per employee," recalls John Hoskinson, who worked there in the 1980s.

Crest also gave employees 25 gallons of gas a week. "Just pull up your car and leave the keys at reception and it would be filled," said Hoskinson, who helped Rasmussen design circuits.

Largesse kept employees loyal. But it also cut Crest's profit, and hence its tax bill, at a time when corporate taxes were 50 percent, a holdover from the war.

While high tax rates were considered a drag on business, they had the side effect of prompting Rasmussen and others to invest in research and new products. Rather than taking money out of the company as profit and paying luxury taxes or high income taxes, he

**"I just wanted easier ways to do things."**

HARRY RASMUSSEN  
*Explaining his inventions*

and others preferred to spend it on employees or plow it back into researching and developing new inventions.

And new inventions there were. As his factory was set up in 1972, Rasmussen watched Bell's crew use hundreds of wires and \$11,000 in equipment to install two lines and six phones.

"Those guys were there for 10 days eating my doughnuts," he recalls.

Inspired, he found a way to replace Bell's mess with a circuit so simple "you could hold it in

the palm of your hand," he said. It sold for \$70 as a retrofit kit for Bell phones and became another instant hit.

Still, Rasmussen wasn't satisfied. He spent the next few years developing his grandest gamble yet: his own two-line telephone. He gave it a distinctive new shape, placing the cradle on the left side of a rectangular base, with buttons on the right. It was a product that would change the phone industry. He patented the idea, one of 18 patents he holds.

But Rasmussen's small com-

pany was about to collide with two of the biggest shifts in U.S. economic history: Reagan's economic revolution and the break-up of regulated monopolies symbolized by AT&T.

A new economy was taking shape. It would trigger a boom in startups and innovation, and also unprecedented foreign competition and outsourcing.

Thirty-five years later, his business destroyed by foreign competition, Rasmussen would forklift the old economy — his beloved machines — to the dump.

And he would gamble one last time on innovations still in their infancy in the 1970s: software and the Internet.

Alwyn Scott 206-464-3329 or  
ascott@seattletimes.com

**ABOUT THE SERIES |**

*This is part of an occasional series on globalization and Washington's trade-dependent economy. This week we show how the global economy rose from the ashes of WWII and how a classic American entrepreneur struggled to survive in the changing world.*

**TOMORROW IN THE TIMES**  
Part 2: The global economy takes off and Rasmussen's business collapses.

> Live Q&A online: At noon tomorrow, reporter Alwyn Scott will answer your questions about the global economy's roots, conflicts and future. Questions can be submitted in advance to [webmetro@seattletimes.com](mailto:webmetro@seattletimes.com)

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Every Sunday in the Opinion section.

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