

Bernie Mann

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Travel and Events Director, *Our State*

To the members of the City and Regional Magazine Association, the publisher of *Our State* magazine is known as Bernie Mann. To the dedicated staff of the publication, he is known as Super Mann, able to leap over tall objections from advertisers in a single bound, faster than an approaching paper shortage, and strong enough to rescue a fledgling regional magazine 26 years ago and turn it into an advertising and subscriber powerhouse. It looked like a job for Super Mann. And it was.

When Bernie bought *The State* magazine in 1996, there were only 23,000 subscribers. Over time, he transformed the then 63-year-old, 45-page, mostly black-and-white publication into an award-winning, full-color, 200-plus-page magazine. He changed the name to *Our State* to represent the inclusivity of the magazine, and then hired the best writers, photographers, and editors to accurately showcase the beauty, diversity, and allure of North Carolina. As Bernie has always said, "I hire the best people and get out of their way."

When the publication reached 30,000 subscribers, Bernie flew his entire staff to Disney World to celebrate for the day. His showmanship, grandiose ideas, business acumen, and generosity have been the hallmark of what makes Bernie a success. His love of the dramatic fueled his early career as a radio disc jockey in New York City. The native New Yorker quickly realized that the money was in sales and station ownership. For 25 years, he owned and operated 12 radio stations in North Carolina, Virginia, and Arkansas.

For the past two and a half decades Bernie has worked tirelessly, growing, promoting, and evolving *Our State* to attract more readers. Currently, there are more than 185,000 subscribers in all 50 states and in 16 foreign countries. Taking into account the pass-along readership, more than a million people around the globe read *Our State* each month. In 2011 and 2012, *Our State* won Folio's Eddie Gold Award, for "Best Full Issue: Regional Magazine."

The quality of the magazine is beyond compare but, another element of Bernie's success has been his belief in marketing and advertising. One of his favorite marketing initiatives has been the 17-time, Emmy-Award winning television show named for the publication, which ran on PBS-NC for eight seasons. Each segment was based on a story from the magazine. The show consistently was in the most-watched category and, still receives enormous response for its reruns. It is slated to be revived this year.

Bernie also developed a robust portfolio of brand extensions, including an extensive product line that sells jewelry, art, pottery, and food from North Carolina companies. *Our State* prints various theater playbills for theaters across the state, and partners with most of the state's university theater venues in cross promotion.

The digital offerings at *Our State* provide a strong extension for the legacy brand as well. The website has an average of 520,000 page views each month. There are regularly deployed email newsletters that cover themes ranging from recipes and travel inspiration to outdoors and home and garden. These newsletters are sent to more than 120,000 opt-in email subscribers. The company has an active social media presence on several platforms, including Facebook, with more than 202,222 followers; and Instagram, with more than 177,925 followers; and also Twitter and YouTube.

The *Our State* brand also includes a travel division with more than 25 unique domestic and international travel opportunities, special events, and weekend getaways offered each year.

The company's signature event, The Best of Our State, is a weekend where the magazine comes to life with North Carolina music, history, humor, literature, art, and food. The event is now in its 23rd year. It started at Asheville's Grove Park Inn, where the general manager at the time thought the idea was so bad that he was only willing to give Bernie the most unfavorable weekend of the year to try the event. The first weekend after New Year's. After a couple of years, the weekend started selling out. Currently most all attendees book before they leave to ensure a spot for the next year.

Bernie's tenacity and hard work extend to his community involvement as well. He is a past Chairman of the Board for the Greensboro Convention & Visitors Bureau. He is a past president of the Greensboro Symphony and has served on the boards of directors for the North Carolina Arts Council and the Eastern Music Festival. A Greensboro Rotary member since 1990, he served as president from 2006 to 2007.

Bernie has received numerous accolades over the years. In 2015, he was recognized with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, North Carolina. In December of 2012, North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue bestowed upon him the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, one of the highest honors a governor can award. In addition, former North Carolina Governor Mike Easley awarded him with the 2006 "Winner's Circle" award for his contribution to North Carolina's travel and tourism industry, the 2005 North Carolina Presenters Consortium Award for service to the arts industry, and the 2003 Charles Kuralt Media Award for the promotion of North Carolina.

Bernie received his BA from Adelphi University in Garden City, New York. He attended Harvard Business School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He lives in Greensboro, North Carolina with his wife, Bobbie. They have three children and nine grandchildren.

As part of Bernie's legacy, in March of 2018, he sold the company into an employee stock ownership plan. While he remains the publisher of *Our State*, he is no longer the owner — the employees are. Bernie has ensured that the magazine will continue celebrating North Carolina far into the future.

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