

The Inspiration Business

JACK KRASULA MADE A FORTUNE IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY; NOW HE'S GIVING IT ALL BACK — ONE DIME AT A TIME BY TOM BEAMAN

Jack Krasula settles into his chair before the microphone in WJR Radio's Production Studio 1. The host of *Anything Is Possible*, which airs Sundays at 6 p.m., is recording his 91st show today. Across the desk from him sits 83-year-old John Riccardo, former president and CEO of Chrysler Corp. Riccardo seems nervous; this is the first interview he has given in 27 years. But as the show begins, Riccardo

out to Ford's Lee Iacocca. As part of the deal to entice Iacocca, Riccardo offered to relinquish his CEO position to him a year after Iacocca started. Once Iacocca was on board, Chrysler's outlook began to improve, but things got worse for Riccardo. As part of the federal loan guarantee agreement that he and Iacocca negotiated with Congress and the Carter Administration to save the company, Riccardo was forced to resign, the symbol of the old regime that was blamed for Chrysler's woes. Iacocca took over as chairman in 1979 and the rest, as they say, is history.

Talking with Krasula, Riccardo sounds upbeat, almost noble, as he describes how his team negotiated the bailout and how he symbolically sacrificed his career. "The greatest duty of a CEO," Riccardo says, "is to ensure the continuity of his company. Courage is falling in battle for the right cause."

Overcoming adversity is a common theme on *Anything Is Possible*, whose guests have ranged from astronaut Gene Cernan to Beverly Hills divorcee-turned-nun Mother Antonia. "The show is meant to inspire people," Krasula says. The birth of the show is a classic example of being careful what you wish for, lest you get it. Krasula, 58, was frustrated with what he sees as today's mean-spirited media culture. "When we were kids, we had heroes," he says. "Now, the media wants to knock everybody down." That concern surfaced during a 2005 golf game with good friend Mike Fezzey, who just happens to be WJR's president and general manager. "I told him, 'Mike, you need more positive stuff on the radio,'" Krasula recalls. "'You should have a show on once a week where you highlight one person who started with nothing, overcame great odds and is giving back — to inspire people.' A couple weeks later Fezzey called and said, 'Jack, I love the idea and I think you'd be the perfect host!'"

But Jack Krasula isn't just the host of a radio show. He's also an entrepreneur, an investor, an art collector, and a world-class sports fan. His day job is president of Trustinus, LLC, the Southfield-



AWE-INSPIRED
Krasula with Pope John Paul II. He's met scores of other luminaries, as well.

relaxes and talks about the various chapters of his life: how, as the son of poor Italian immigrants, he helped support his family by manually bending handlebars in a bicycle factory; how, during World War II, he drove trucks into China along the Burma Road; how he earned a master's degree in economics from the University of Michigan; and how, in 1959, he gave up the chance for a lifetime partnership at accounting firm Touche Ross in order to join Chrysler.

In the 1970s, as president, Riccardo was leading Chrysler's efforts to survive in the face of increased foreign competition and government regulation. Desperate for management talent, the company reached

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF JACK KRASULA; BRAD ZIEGLER



SIGNATURE MAN Krasula has collected thousands of signatures from pro athletes, politicians, and celebrities. The list includes Mario Andretti, President George W. Bush, Mary Kay Ash, and Mark O'Meara.

based executive-search firm. But it's probably more accurate to say that Krasula is in the encouragement business. "I see myself as a motivator, a nudger — someone who inspires people to reach a little higher," he explains. He modestly downplays the "bucket of money" he made from the sale of his first company, Decision Consultants Inc. (DCI), claiming that he gets more satisfaction from helping friends. Coming from most people, that could sound disingenuous; coming from Jack Krasula, you believe it. The company, a forerunner to today's mammoth information-technology industry, was sold for \$55 million in 2002.

Krasula is also a philanthropist, and his generosity has benefited, among others, the National Baseball Hall of Fame, whose educational arm provides baseball-themed lesson plans to 20 million schoolkids a year. "Jack is the most optimistic, forward-looking personality I've ever met," says Dale Petroskey, Hall of Fame president and an Inkster native. "Nothing is going to stop him from trying to do good and reach his goals."

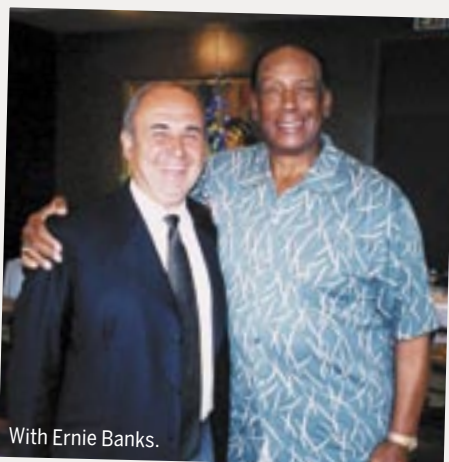
Krasula credits his work-ethic and glass-half-full outlook to his parents. "From my dad, I learned that you get up early, you work hard, and you stay humble; and from my mom I learned [to] be good to people, treat people special," he recalls. Young Jack took this advice to heart and began working at an early age, sweeping up behind the elephants in a downtown Chicago parade. He also took inspiration from his hero, Chicago Cubs Hall of Fame shortstop Ernie Banks, whose positive outlook earned him the nickname "Mr. Sunshine."

Krasula earned a B.A. in mathematics from Lewis College in Romeoville, Ill. He says he was a good student, but school was never important to him. "All that mattered was to finish the homework so I could go out and play sports," he says. Realizing that he would never play at Wrigley Field, Krasula began to look for a more traditional career. His lightning-bolt moment came during college when a friend told him how someday he could make \$15,000 a year programming computers. "That's the day I decided what I was going to do," Krasula says. "I didn't know what the heck they were, but \$15,000 was like \$5 million."

Not long after receiving his master's degree from Loyola University in 1972, while



With Rudy Giuliani.



With Ernie Banks.



With George Brett, Yogi Berra, and Bill Murray.

working as a programmer at Illinois Bell, Krasula got a call from a recruiter at information technology services firm Cutler-Williams, who offered him a job in Detroit. Tempted as much by the prospect of his first airplane ride as by the job offer, he flew to Detroit with the promise that the firm would move him back to Chicago in six months. Four years later, still in Detroit, Krasula left Cutler-Williams and formed DCI to serve his first client, American Motors Corp. DCI's first month's billings were \$2,700.

The company grew, taking on contracts ranging from maintaining corporate average fuel-economy data to tracking railroad freight cars. At its peak, DCI was the largest privately held IT services firm in the country, with 1,800 employees, annual revenue of \$150 million, and offices throughout the United States and in India. In 2002, Krasula sold DCI to Colorado-based Ciber Inc. for \$55 million.

It was at DCI that Krasula first began to put his inspirational skills to work on a large scale. Twice a month for 26 years, his employees received a signed letter with their paychecks. The letters contained messages about teamwork, serving the customer, or going the extra mile. "It was a way to propagate our culture and to inspire people," Krasula explains. He still sends at least five handwritten thank-you letters a day.

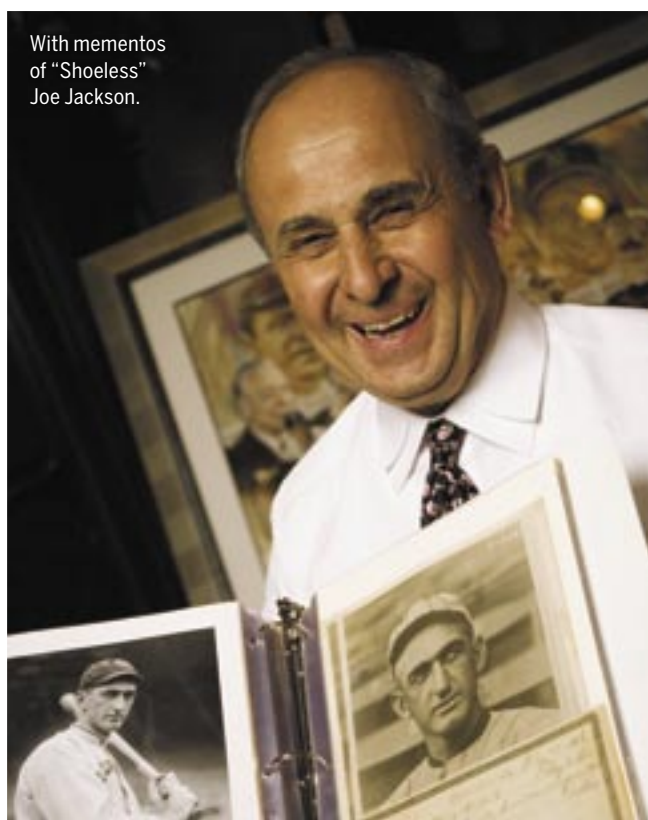
After making his mark in the IT industry, Krasula didn't have to think twice about what

to do for an encore. "[Executive search] made all the sense in the world," he says. "I know a lot of people in town. People trust me; they're always looking for stronger leadership."

Since 2003, Trustinus has matched presidents, vice presidents, COOs, and CFOs with some 50 companies. As Krasula describes his business, his homespun philosophy is clear: "We don't have any clients," he says. "All we have are Jack's friends. We can't let a friend down. To have your friend from the company who gave you the search say, 'Jack, she's doing fabulous' — that's much more rewarding than the check that comes. It's all about encouraging people."

Krasula won't divulge the financial state of the privately held Trustinus, but his reputation is well-known. "The guy is a master," says a competitor who requested anonymity. "If I could buy stock in a person, I'd buy it in Jack."

Krasula's strong work ethic and steadfast determination to see a job through his way emerged in the third grade, when he received an assignment to write to five politicians. He would have nothing to do with that. Being an avid sports fan, Krasula instead wrote to his favorite baseball players, including Banks, Willie Mays, and Mickey Mantle. Such insubordination didn't sit well with the nuns who taught him. But what was seen as a snub of their authority set Krasula off on a lifetime endeavor that provides more than a glimpse into what makes him tick.



With mementos of "Shoeless" Joe Jackson.

Today, Jack Krasula proudly shows visitors copies of the autographs he's collected since: *every* Hall of Famer in *every* sport, the greats of golf, all but three of the 20 major-league baseball players who've hit 500 home runs. He owns a handwritten or typed letter from every U.S. president and signed portraits of every president since Grant. A letter signed by Abraham Lincoln hangs in his office along with personal letters from Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, and Gerald Ford. "I just set out to do it, and my DNA is when I set out to do something, it's more important for me to prove ... to myself that I can do it than to prove it to anyone else."

His hobby evolved from simply collecting autographs to soliciting life philosophies from people he admires. To date, some 150 have responded ... people as diverse as Florine Mark of Weight Watchers and Charles W. Colson of The Prison Fellowship. Krasula recently met Ted Koppel in a Troy men's room. Odds are that Koppel will soon be getting a letter.

Krasula stresses that his collections, grand though they may be, do not define him. "If I go to meet my maker and I tell him I have the world's greatest sports collection, he's going to say, 'Jackie, you missed the point.'" What does define Krasula is his need to be positive, to encourage, to serve. Sure, he gets a kick out of opening his mailbox and finding a letter from Mark O'Meara or Norman Vincent Peale, but it's more important to him to share them with others. That's why he hosts *Anything Is Possible* and why he'll soon publish a book that will be a compilation of the most notable philosophy-of-life letters in his collection.

When it seems you've learned everything about Jack Krasula you can possibly learn, he tells you about the bank he's starting in Florida with veteran banking entrepreneur and Flint-based Citizens Republic Bancorp Chairman Jerry D. Campbell. Because of ongoing negotiations, Krasula won't divulge the bank's name, but he says the goal for the new institution is to be the largest Florida-owned bank, with 50 branches in five years.

"Jerry Campbell is so honest you could shoot craps with him over the telephone," Krasula says. "If we can't be successful in the banking business with Jerry as our chairman, we're in trouble." Krasula will serve as a board member and will help find key employees. He's also a major investor, but his investment goals are not typical.

"In a perfect world," he says, "I'd give away my last dollar on the day I die. God expects me to use this money to help others, to make a difference. We're investing a portion of this money in the bank in the hope that it multiplies ... which means we can help more people. You have to take calculated risks and make wise investments to grow it, so you have more to give back."

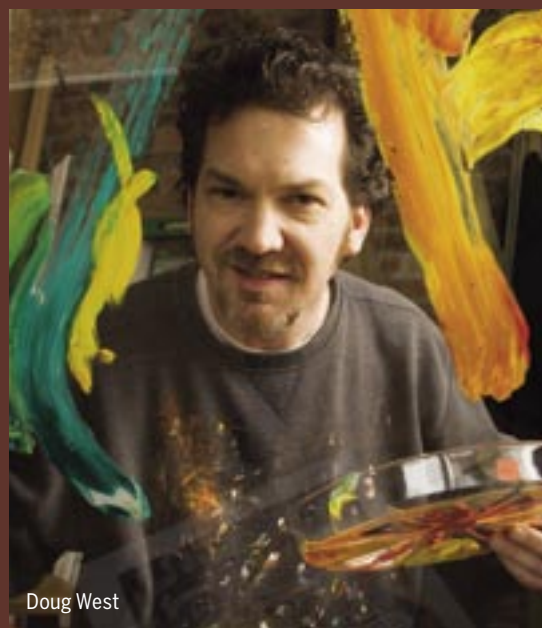
Krasula's mother — and Ernie Banks — would be proud. **db**

Patron of the Arts

Krasula de'Medici

Doug West was not a starving artist. The Warren native, who sold his first drawings at the age of 13, had found a comfortable niche creating sports art in a style inspired by both LeRoy Neiman and Peter Max. He was happy traveling the country and selling his paintings at sports shows. Then Jack Krasula saw an ad for West's original Hockey Hall of Fame paintings in *Sports Collectors Digest* and called him to buy his Stan Mikita portrait. They continued to correspond for two years, during which Krasula purchased more works.

"As soon as we met, it was instant chemistry," says West, who now works out of a studio in his home in Rochester Hills. "His passion for sports and my own passion for sports art ... it was like a marriage." Since then, West has painted exclusively for Krasula, who is now his patron.



Doug West

West specializes in bold, colorful watercolor and acrylic collages that depict star athletes in action. He often paints with the image upside down, saying that it helps him see the elements of a portrait more clearly. Krasula keeps each original, but he donates the limited-edition lithographs to benefit charities such as the Suite Dreams Project, the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation, and Detroit's Cornerstone Schools.

West is not just a means to Krasula's ends. Like so many others, he has benefited from their association. Sensing the young artist's passion, Krasula encouraged West to evolve his style into a bold blend of impressionism, realism, and modernism. And through their creative and charitable activities, West has developed a confidence that had eluded him before. "My paintings from the '70s and '80s were good," West says, "but I'm not proud of them. My soul wasn't in them. But with these, I've followed my inspiration...Jack gave me the wings to fly." **db**