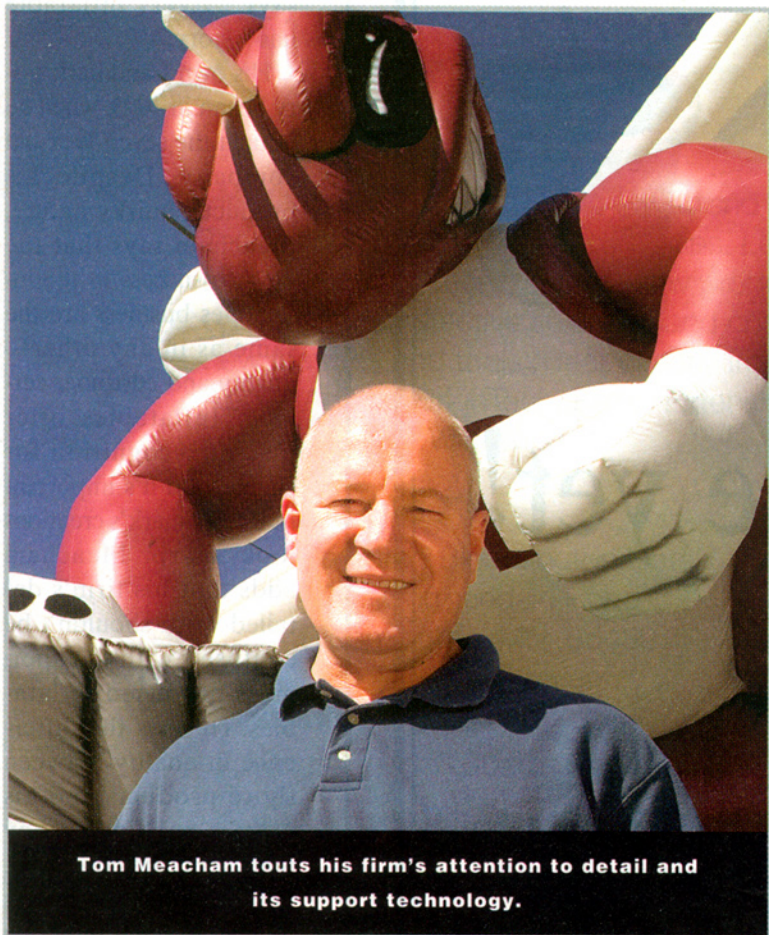


Not Just Air

LANDMARK CREATIONS' EXPANSION IS DUE TO ITS DISTINCTIVE INFLATABLE DESIGNS.



Tom Meacham touts his firm's attention to detail and its support technology.

In a sense, Landmark Creations International's genesis began with a dinosaur. Though he had already owned the Burnsville-based firm for a few years before this project came along, Tom Meacham says that's what "started it all" for his firm in terms of its growth. Landmark makes custom inflatables—figures filled with cold air or helium used in event promotion, art, or just for fun.

In 1996, *Sesame Street Live's* scenery company asked Land-

mark to make an inflatable birthday cake that would appear on stage to celebrate the "birthday" of B. J., the good friend of beloved TV dinosaur Barney. The cake turned out well, and it created a chain reaction of referrals and publicity that led to an order in 1997 from Oprah Winfrey's Angel Network for 200 giant inflatable birds—Landmark Creations' biggest order to date.

"You never know what the next project is going to be,"

Meacham says. The diversity of Landmark's projects requires a flexible imagination—and a lot of skill. A 52-foot humpback whale, a perfect rendition of Serta's "counting sheep," a highly detailed version of college football's Heisman Trophy, a rendering of a dogfish brain (for an artist)—the list goes on and on. As Meacham says, "Every inflatable has a story."

His own Landmark story began in 1993, when he bought the seven-year-old company. Despite his products' quirky nature, Meacham says that the keys to success in the inflatables business are the same as in any other—quality and customer service. Inflatables offer instant recognition for clients, and it's important that Landmark's creations look sharp. Meacham adds that his firm's detailed work shouldn't be confused with cheaper, mass-produced inflatables. He says the difference in quality between those products and his own is such that they really can't be compared. For one thing, Landmark uses an internal tethering system that minimizes stress on the fabric.

While Landmark's revenues are growing—about \$1.2 million last year, with \$1.5 million projected for 2004—Meacham seems content to keep his 12-person company expanding on a manageable scale. "Our customers will decide how big we are," he says. That they will. ■

—Stephanie Xenos