

John Schneider

Firm's secret

Midwest Publishing officials won't even reveal their names

EATON RAPIDS — Rick Dehlohen had a dilemma on his hands.

He had been encouraging his 16-year-old son, James, to seek artistic employment. The kid did not mind. Suddenly Dehlohen found himself in the unenviable role of trying to talk his son out of taking the job.

"I started, if not hesitantly enough, with James' assessor," he said. He had an interview scheduled with a company called Midwest Publishing Inc. of East Lansing.

Through proof of his son's initiative, Dehlohen, who lives in Eaton Rapids, had to ask the question: Did good parents would ask...

"Mostly, would James be engaged in a legal activity? Let me say right away that the answer to that question is, as far as I can tell, 'Yes.'"

The reason I can't say absolutely is that the company spokesman — pointing to his only as "Nolan" — refused to answer even my first question, which was: "Your last name, please?"

On my first fact-finding call to Midwest, I spoke to a woman who told me that all information about the company would have to come from Nolan.

I asked her for Nolan's last name — not because I had any suspicions in mind, but because I customarily identify people here by using both their first and last names.

He would not give, however, that I would have to get the information about Nolan's last name straight from Nolan.

No name

Nolan never returned my call. I called back and eventually got him on the phone. I explained who I was and the nature of my inquiry, but I encountered resistance.

In reply to the question about his last name he said: "I won't be able to help you with that."

Nolan also reminded me that his company was a "major advertiser" with the Blue Journal and that he had attorneys ready to prosecute if I threatened Midwest Publishing Inc.

One — still trying to do what I was doing — and perhaps other 16-year-olds — might be doing for Midwest Publishing Inc.

Who was that even at 16-year-old James' father, my son's father, in what he would tell him.

For one thing, James didn't actually apply for the job. As James understood it, Midwest got his name from a friend who was getting paid for the name of other teenagers who might go to work for the company.

For another thing, James was under the impression that he would be soliciting contributions over the telephone for an anti-drug campaign in California.

Said the father: "I thought, 'It all sounds like something John Schneider has written about.'"

90 percent?

Dehlohen called the Michigan Attorney General's office. He learned that Midwest is, indeed, a professional fundraising company with 180 offices in Michigan, although the California anti-drug campaign wasn't among them.

Dehlohen also learned that, like other professional fundraisers, Midwest keeps as much as 90 percent of the money it raises.

The day after I spoke to Nolan, I received a call from a man who identified himself as the president of Midwest Publishing.

He didn't deny any of the information Dehlohen gave me but refused to say what percentage of the take Midwest generally keeps.

He also refused to reveal not only his last name, but his first name as well.

He also threatened me with legal action and ordered me to get out of his office anyway.

Marion Gordon, administrator of donations from the Michigan attorney general, confirmed that Midwest Publishing Inc. is licensed to solicit funds in Michigan.

Did that mean, I asked Gordon, that it's a legitimate company?

Gordon said she would prefer to avoid the word "legitimate."

But do you really? Call John Schneider at 377-1170. He calls me now daily.

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