

The magazine that showcases the faces behind the places

# Saratoga

## COUNTY LIVING

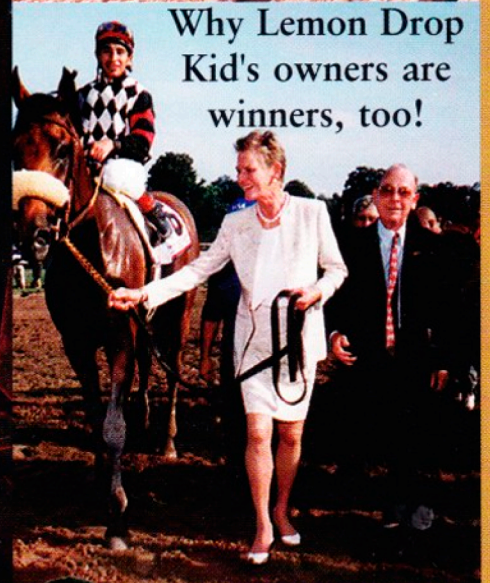
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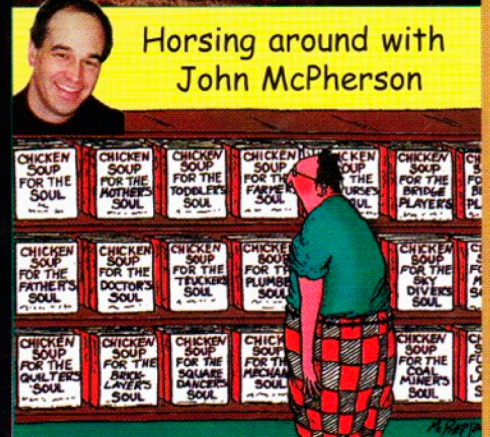
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Horsing around with  
John McPherson



# Map company founder needed little direction as host of Freihofer's "Breadtime Stories"

*Leafing through an old family album recently, editor Ann Hauprich found herself drawn to a 1959 photo in which she was sporting a frilly party dress and a Freihofer's baking hat. In her hands was an enormous cartoon-like drawing bearing the caption: "My Freihofer SQUIGGLE."*

*The picture rekindled some delicious childhood memories of a popular weekday afternoon television program (Freddie Freihofer's "Breadtime Stories") and the host who had squiggled his way into thousands of young Capital Region hearts during the 50s and 60s.*

*Determined to find out what had become of the program's beloved host (known to legions of Baby Boomers as "Uncle Jim") Ann placed some calls that led to a warm welcome inside the Burnt Hills home of Jim Fisk.*

*P.S. The directions he provided to his residence were excellent!*

Most of those seeking direction in the great northeast have, at one time or another, unwittingly turned to "Uncle" Jim Fisk for guidance.

That's because after his days as a trailblazer in children's broadcasting ended in 1966, the squiggling storyteller made inroads on a much broader scale when he founded JIMAPCO, creators of those wonderful "Maps to swear by . . . not at!"

An innovator both by nature and necessity during his early days as a set designer at WRGB, Fisk was not about to loaf when his role as a friendly Freihofer delivery man drew to a close nearly 35 years ago.

"Looking back, I realize I was privileged to be a part of television in its infancy. When I got my job as a set designer at WRGB in 1945, everything was brand new. We were constantly experimenting. All of the shows were black and white and the quality of the pictures broadcast into homes was such that most of the program sets could be drawn on sheets of corrugated cardboard using nothing but black and white chalk."

Sometimes sets were essentially erased and recycled into new ones. "We worked like crazy designing and building sets in those days. It was a race just to keep up."

Adding to the challenges -- and excitement -- was the fact that the programs, including the phenomenally popular "Teenage Barn", were all live.

"There was no taping. No second chances. Viewers saw and heard everything exactly as it happened, flubs and all," recalls Fisk, flashing the contagious smile that won him legions of

young fans during his decade-long stint as "The Freihofer Man."

Through it all, Fisk says, he received little direction from either the station's management or Freihofer's, the show's sponsor, who trusted him implicitly to script and host his 15-minute children's segments from start to finish -- commercials included.

After the long-running program (it had begun with a different host in 1949) went off the air in 1966, Fisk -- who was still employed as a WRGB set designer -- initially felt a bit lost with all the extra time on his hands. Before long, however, the man who prided himself on requiring minimal direction from his bosses found he was frequently being asked for directions -- from those living in, as well as visiting, the Capital Region.

"The landscape surrounding the tri-cities was changing by leaps and bounds. The burbs were exploding . . . with the construction of the Northway and so many new housing developments, schools and shopping centers, it was becoming difficult for motorists to find their way around," recalls Fisk.

When attempts to locate quality up-to-date maps proved futile, Fisk began drawing them himself -- sometimes on the backs of envelopes. "I have absolutely no training as a cartographer . . . JIMAPCO started out as a hobby -- a hobby that went bananas!"

His first official map, which became the foundation for JIMAPCO (what else would one call a map company started by a guy named Jim?), was a detailed one of Burnt Hills. Researched by "driving every street myself" and seeking input from such diverse

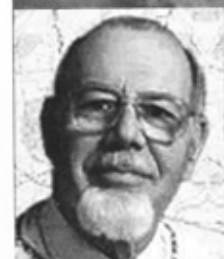
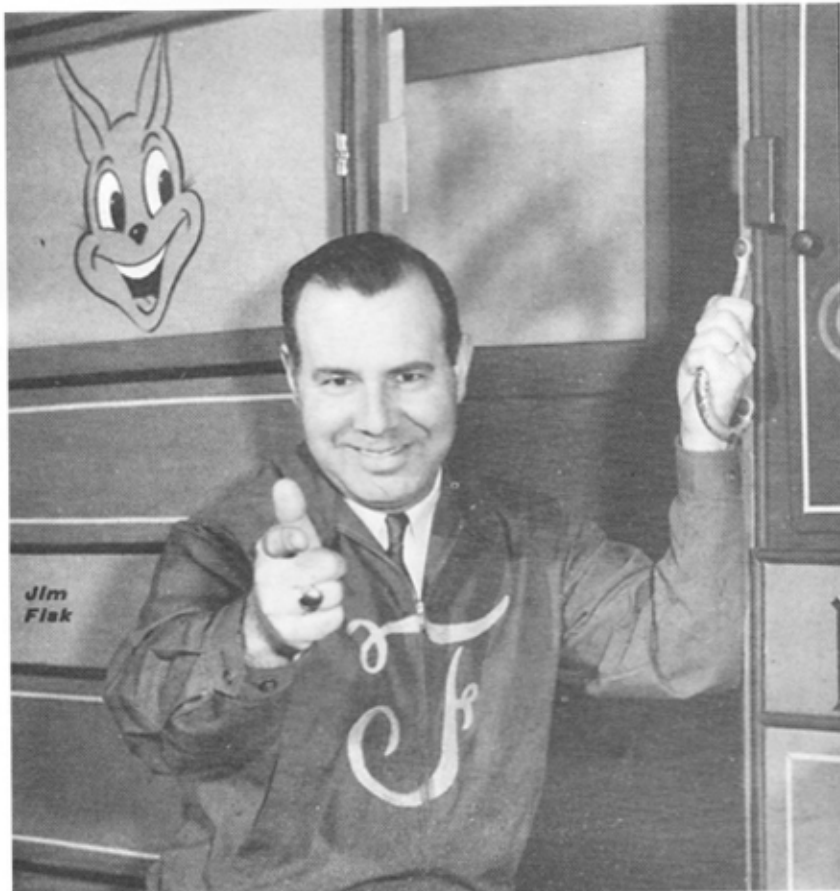


Ann Hauprich poses with her unique Jim Fisk "squiggle" back in 1959 . . . and with her daughter Klersten exactly 40 years later!



"The drawing lessons were quite popular judging from the number of pictures sent in. Our total mail count, including ticket requests, peaked at 6,000 a month. During the early 1960s, attendance to the show was booked 20 weeks in advance. . ."

-- Jim Fisk



*maps to swear by . . . not at!*  
**JIMAPCO**

Jim Fisk today (left) with the familiar logo of the map-making company he founded in the basement of his Burnt Hills home in 1966 and as Freddie Freilhofer's squiggling "Uncle Jim."



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## We (still) think you're swell!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

sources as school districts and fire departments, Fisk took the hand-drawn map, complete with points of interest, to a local printer who ran off about 2,000 copies. His first distributor was Veedor & Yelverton, a small Burnt Hills drug store.

Before long, the former "Freihofer Man" was receiving phone calls from such big players as New York Telephone and Niagara Mohawk asking him to chart updated maps of Clifton Park and other areas.

"I knew I had a tiger by the tail, but I never dreamed JIMAPCO would become the success that it has . . . it just grew like Topsy," muses Fisk, who says he was "personally involved" in the making of at least 20 maps, driving every street in Saratoga County himself to ensure detailed accuracy.

"For the first 20 years JIMAPCO ran out of Fisk's residence: first in his basement and later in a sunny upstairs room before relocating to more spacious quarters in Round Lake. The Route 9 location is also just a stone's throw from the Northway -- making it more convenient for clients to find.

Nearly 35 years after its founding, JIMAPCO's maps can be found in many national retail chains where their excellent quality, ease of use and accurate information live up to the company slogan "Maps to swear by . . . not at!"

Today JIMAPCO researches and maintains approximately 75 of its own titles as well as selling and distributing hundreds more from such esteemed publishers as American Map, Delorme, Michelin, Rand McNally and USGS.



Fisk opted to take an early retirement from JIMAPCO about eight years ago, placing his oldest son Dave in charge of the business. The other Fisk children, Thomas, Barbara and Sarah, chose other career paths.

"So much of the work we used to do by hand was becoming computerized and digitized. It was a whole new concept and I felt it best to bow out and make a clean break. Nowadays I go down about twice a month and take credit when things look good."

Instead of making road maps, JIMAPCO's founder is now making tracks: an upstairs area once used for Jimapco production today houses a spectacular model railroad display -- complete with billboards promoting the map company's familiar logo and slogan!

He also builds beautiful boats that have proven their seaworthiness near his summer home on Lake George.

But that, dear readers, is another "Breadtime" story!

## Smitten with Witten?

Searching for an autographed copy of one of Matt Witten's first two Saratoga-based murder mysteries? The author suggests you take a short walk or drive to Craven's on Broadway or Walden's in the mall. Unsigned copies are, of course, available anyplace in the world via the web. (His third book is due out in November.)

