Anniversary Glistens for Healthy Start

by Kym Conis
When Healthy Start, Inc. set out to celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2011 – a milestone it thought unreachable back in 1991 – it aspired to raise the bar with its annual letter and report. Seeking a piece that would highlight its accomplishments in a way that was fun yet glamorous and classy, AlphaGraphics in the Cultural District, Pittsburgh, PA, teamed up with The Letterpress Shoppe (also in Pittsburgh) to create an album cover set decorated with glistening foils in an exciting, retro design.

The three-piece set consists of an elaborately decorative cover with four passes of tightly registered foil that opens to reveal a right-hand pocket. Inside the pocket is a “record sleeve” housing the Healthy Start story diecut in the form of an old-fashioned vinyl – foil stamped in two passes. The third piece is a grommeted and scored invitation cut in the shape of a circle, mirroring the front cover and vinyl design.

**Platinum & Promises**

According to AlphaGraphics Assistant Manager Liz Payne, in addition to the piece being fun yet glamorous, Healthy Start wanted the piece to have longevity and be used to distribute its collection of annual reports, as well as be kept by others affiliated with the organization. “After careful thought, we presented the ‘Platinum & Promises – 20 Record-Breaking Years’ theme as a way to tie in the 20th anniversary using ‘platinum’, which is used universally to signify the 20th anniversary, and ‘promises’ to tie in all those made and kept throughout Healthy Start’s existence,” said Payne.

In order to give it its glamour edge, AlphaGraphics Design & Marketing Manager Tracy Schneider used a Hollywood-themed spotlight icon to convey twenty years, along with unique design elements that set this piece apart, all centered on a music theme. Bright metallic foils of silver, magenta, turquoise and blue twirl in patterns and shapes to bring the retro design to life.

Each year, Healthy Start, Inc. (HSI), a not-for-profit organization focused primarily on the reduction of infant mortality and low birth weight babies in Southwestern PA, participates in the national Healthy Start Association Conference in Washington, DC. The event provides an opportunity for all 104 federally funded projects across 38 states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico to present information pertaining to their projects’ innovative programs while also petitioning legislative officials at state and federal levels for additional funding to help sustain their existence.

“The HSI Pittsburgh/Allegheny County project informed its agency, Mindful Creative, Inc., of its desire to not only display the organization’s innovative programs and forward thinking methods, but also capture its 20-year history. Mindful Creative turned to AlphaGraphics in the Cultural District to help make the vision a reality,” stated Payne.

As the audience for the commemorative project consisted of legislative officials and their key staff members, health professionals who serve as influential stakeholders and decision makers and private funders responsible for providing critical financial support, the design needed to be smart, eye-catching and memorable to support the organization’s ongoing cause.

Mirroring the music industry and its celebration of platinum records, the Healthy Start program had its first ‘platinum hit’ two decades ago when the program launched. “As with all great recording artists, the really great ones have a ‘greatest hits’ collection to showcase their very best work,” said Payne. “This project did exactly that – highlighted the best of HSI’s 20 glorious years.”

According to Payne, the piece capitalized on the iconic image of a music album featuring the “greatest hits” of the past 20 years. The record theme was carried throughout in both content and design. “For example,” she explained, “each song title ties into the section of text it represents, i.e., ‘Reach, I’ll be There’ highlights the community programs and ‘Money, Money, Money’ highlights the organization’s financials.”

Like actual vinyls, the customized package and booklet displayed custom designs with psychedelic foiling to create the authentic look and feel of a real record album. Other musical elements, such as musical instruments, were tied into the design and text of the booklet, creating a truly unique piece. A specially designed “sleeve” was created to hold the record-shaped booklet displaying photos taken over the years.

**Communication spells success**

Every step of the project was carefully coordinated and communication constant between The Letterpress Shoppe, AlphaGraphics and the printer, JB Kreider (Pittsburgh, PA). “Because of the complex details, one shift could have spelled disaster,” said Payne. “So there were various press checks, sample proofs, etc., that had to be accounted for within the production timeline.” And that timeline was extremely tight with zero room for error.
“We have a good working relationship with AlphaGraphics and JB Kreider,” said Paul Adametz, production manager at The Letterpress Shoppe. “As we do with every project, we try to give the customer the best value for its money – even when the budget is close to unlimited.”

One advantage that The Letterpress Shoppe has over its finishing competitors in the Pittsburgh region is that both Adametz and the company’s customer service rep have degrees in graphic design. Combined, the two have 42 years of graphic design knowledge and experience with specialty graphic arts finishing processes.

Originally, Adametz suggested running a Unifraxion® die for the cover and then overprinting with 4/C process. However, with a tight production schedule of only two weeks, it was decided to stick with processes familiar to everyone involved. The safest route for the cover was to go with four passes of foil…four tightly registered passes!

The Letterpress Shoppe provides foil stamping, embossing and diecutting services to about 225 commercial printers in the Pittsburgh region. It also provides inking services such as numbering, crash imprinting and fine letterpress printing of announcements and invitations. “Specializing in the half sheet-size market of short to medium runs, we will celebrate our 200th year in business this October (calculated in dog years),” joked Adametz.

The 18pt. stock was printed two-up on 23x29" sheets, work and roll. “Because of the complexity of the foil stamping on the outer cover with critical registration, I wanted to make sure the printer put them on the sheet the right way to ensure the best chance of registration,” said Adametz. “We were running (the stamping) one-up and didn’t want to register to someone’s side guide, and I didn’t want to cut the sheet.”

The job was printed on a Heidelberg Speedmaster 102 in 4/C process. Next, the sheets were foil stamped in four passes (silver, blue, turquoise and then magenta) at The Letterpress Shoppe. The foil was supplied by Nakai and API Foils and the flat stamp dies by Universal Engraving. The sheets were diecut on a Heidelberg SBBS 32’ diecutter with steel rule dies provided by Steel Rule DieMasters. Finally, the outer covers were folded and glued on a Moll Regal folder-gluer.

While several aspects of the job presented challenges, according to Adametz, the greatest was running four colors of foil in dead register with fairly large dies. “Universal Engraving provided us with heat-compensated dies that were perfect,” said Adametz. “We ran the job, about 3,000 sheets, on our Brausse PE 202 handfed press, running slowly to ensure that every sheet hit the guides.”

“The inner record sleeve was printed on UV ultra translucent stock, which is difficult to score and fold,” said Adametz. “We ran light perfs instead of scores and were able to machine-glue semi-automatically on our Moll handfed folder-gluer.” The 20+ page booklet was collated and grommeted by Hired Hands in Pittsburgh, and AlphaGraphics put all the final pieces together and made delivery on time to the customer.

**Award-winning effort**

From the start, expectations for the 20-year piece were very high. AlphaGraphics, The Letterpress Shoppe and JB Kreider all rose to the challenge and managed to exceed expectations with the end product. Industry peers would agree, as the Healthy Start project was awarded a silver award in the Foil & Specialty Effects Association 2011 Gold Leaf Awards Competition in the category of Client Promotion.

The HSI organization proudly shared the piece with hundreds of legislative officials and key staff in Washington, DC, as well as hundreds of partnering community agencies that are key influencers both nationally and regionally. Today, the piece continues to be used as a showcase for telling the Healthy Start, Inc. story – past, present and future.