

ARTHUR M. KAGIN RECEIVES ANA'S 2000 FARRAN ZERBE AWARD

Arthur M. Kagin of Des Moines, Iowa, this year's recipient of the American Numismatic Association's (ANA) Farran Zerbe Memorial Award for Distinguished Service, is passionate about numismatics, collecting, the ANA and his family.

"I'm 80 years old, and I have a lot of things to say and do," Kagin says in the cover story in the August issue of *The Numismatist*. He will receive the Association's highest honor at the ANA's 109th Anniversary Convention in Philadelphia, August 9-13.

After more than 70 years as a collector and professional numismatist, Kagin's career has brought him face-to-face with luminaries and lesser-knowns; regardless of their status, this busy, gregarious man makes time for them all.

"The common ingredient in all collecting is imagination," says Kagin, adding that the trait also is shared by successful people. Ask anyone who has traversed a bourse floor in the last six decades, and they can recall the first time they met Kagin, a man brimming with ideas to bolster the numismatic hobby. If one of his suggestions does not fly, he has a pocketful of other ideas just waiting to be expressed, pondered and acted upon.

For example, he thought that anyone who wanted to become a life member of the ANA should be able to do so, regardless of age. When the ANA Board of Governors took no action, he gave the Association \$5,000, saying he wanted to sign up his grandchildren as life members. The check was accepted, and the rule was changed.

When he sought the ANA vice presidency in 1997, having served on the Association's Board of Governors a decade earlier, Kagin stated, "I promise to deliver at least 25 ideas to improve the ANA during my two-year term." No matter that he lost the election - he continues to share his ideas with whomever will lend an ear.

In 1968 the Des Moines B'nai B'rith named Kagin its "Man of the Year," noting he is "a person you can hardly say 'no' to because he always says 'yes' . . . be the cause large or small . . . whether a matter of money or a task no one else will undertake." The award citation adds that Kagin "permits himself to be the sounding board for an untold number of individual problems. He is . . . a deliberate optimist."

From his office in the Insurance Exchange Building on 5th Avenue in Des Moines, Kagin says, "Numismatics is like marriage. It has to be shared to be enjoyed."

Indeed, he shared his love of numismatics with his younger brother Paul for more than 30 years and his late wife, Henrietta (Spitz), for more than 40. Today he continues the tradition with his son Donald; daughter, Judy; and grandson David.

"My mother, who died 25 years ago, didn't understand how I could make a living selling coins," Kagin says, noting that she kept waiting for him to come back home to Minneapolis, where he was born on November 25, 1919.

As a young boy, Kagin sold magazines and newspapers. The advice of one customer changed his life.

"A woman paid with an 1883 'no cents' nickel," he recalls. "She said, 'The government made a mistake, and someday this will be valuable.' I wanted to find more . . ."

Kagin spent the next two years putting together a Liberty Head nickel collection from change he made in sales. Next he moved on to Indian Head cents and Buffalo nickels. He also started collecting stamps, soaking them off canceled envelopes he found.

At age 13, Kagin began working Saturdays and summers for the Hollinbeck Stamp and Coin Company in Minneapolis, selling stamps, coins and paper money.

"Coins didn't start to make it big until Whitman coin cards came out in 1935," he says. "When they did, I knew they would change coin collecting." (Within three years, Kagin became the largest distributor of the blue coin cards, offering to redeem them once filled.) "Today, I am getting that same, good feeling from the new State quarters," he adds.

When he was only 15 years old, Kagin opened and managed a branch office for his employer in Omaha, Nebraska. A year later he was sent to buy the stock of a deceased dealer in Des Moines. Kagin liked the Iowa city and bought the store's fixtures as well, thinking the shop was a great location.

While his boss at first disagreed, Kagin remained in Iowa, buying full ownership of the store in 1940. "If you want something bad enough, you figure out some way to do it. If you sacrifice, you enjoy it more," he adds.

In 1936 Kagin returned to Minneapolis for the ANA convention. While there, he met numismatic legend B. Max Mehl, who gave him the idea to hold mail-bid auctions. Kagin conducted 388 such sales over the course of the next half century. He worked up to 100 hours a week in the 1930s, mimeographing, sending and receiving mail-bid sheets, recording 50-cent to \$10 bids on each item.

Kagin's younger brother Paul joined him in 1940, and over the succeeding decades, their business followed the ebb and flow of numismatics. He was able to work on the big sales, such as the Louis Eliasberg and King Farouk collections. In 1974 his brother left the business, and Kagin formed a new company with his son, called A.M. & Don Kagin. Together they hired dozens of people to help meet the demands of his thriving business.

"You can be the best numismatist in the world, but if you don't merchandise your material, you won't be successful," he advises.

Above all, Kagin believes that education is the key. "Whether you follow numismatics as a profession is not important; what is essential is how you perceive life based on numismatics," he has told his seven grandchildren.

In the 1960s, at the urging of fellow numismatist Abe Kosoff, Kagin established an accredited numismatic program at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He also helped organize the Des Moines Coin Club in 1936 and the Iowa Numismatic Association two years later. In 1955 he was a founding member of the Professional Numismatists Guild, serving as its president from 1963 to 1964 (today, he is one of only a few living charter members). In 1976 he was the first in his field to be recognized in Who's Who in America.

However, it is to the American Numismatic Association that Kagin has devoted much of his time and energy. He joined at 18 (then the minimum allowable age) and today holds life member number 103. "The best investment in numismatics is membership in the ANA," he says. When the subject comes up, he is likely to quip, "Now you're talking my language."

"My father is greatly respected by his children, grandchildren and the numismatic community," Don Kagin says. "His passion for numismatics is exceeded only by that for his family and his religion. I only hope to know half of what he has forgotten."

The American Numismatic Association is a congressionally chartered nonprofit educational organization dedicated to encouraging people to study and collect money and related items. The ANA helps its 28,000 members and the public discover and explore the world of money through its vast array of education and outreach programs, as well as its museum, library, publications, conventions and seminars. For more information, call 719-632-2646 or go to www.money.org.