

Making a living at fast talking

by Karen Kroesche

"I'll go two and a half, two and a half, will you give two and a half, will you make it two and a half, two and a half, will you take it two and a half, will you make it two and a half, two and a half dollar bid."

The words roll off the announcer's lips so rapidly they aren't discernable. "Now five, will you go five, will you take it five, now five, five dollars, will you go five will you make it five will you make it five will you take it five, five dollar bid. Now make it ten, will you go ten..."

Auctioneer A.L. "Buck" Buchanan II is at it again, selling and talking and selling some more.

The excitement is contagious, and auction fever spreads rapidly, as even the most passive bystanders are transformed effortlessly into active participants.

Buchanan is dressed head-to-toe in typical western attire, and sports a dark handlebar moustache which curls around the corners of his mouth and punctuates his every word.

The auctioneer plays with his crowd, pitting one bidder against the other. His jokes are appreciated by his "friends and naaaybers," as he frequently refers to them — a group as diversified as the merchandise being sold. His colorful descriptions of the items up for bid are peppered with sincerity and "good ol' boy" style.

"Now, we plugged this sander in and it makes some noise, but we're not real sure about the motion," Buchanan tells the crowd.

"Kind of like my wife," one buyer retorts. Everyone laughs, including his wife.

The auction is underway in a dimly-lit building at 200 S. Main in downtown Bryan that once housed the Howell & Co. Wholesale Grocers. More than 120 people fill the unairconditioned first floor, sitting attentively in old wooden church pews, or leaning casually against the nearest piece of furniture — until it is sold.

The pace is quick, and many a brow is dampened with perspiration. But a friendly spirit of competition pervades the humid air, as each buyer bids on his own personal treasure.

The objects up for bid range from Lazy Boys to lawn mowers, from pianos to plumbing fixtures. With 318 items to sell in three hours or less, Bu-

work," Buchanan explains. "So I decided just to get my own license and go at it myself.

"It's a very, very, very competitive business, and it's real hard to build," he emphasizes. "There are a lot of good auctioneers out there."

Buchanan says he has been holding local auctions for the last four years, but it is still nec-

tioners use between the numbers, and adds that some announcers even tell stories between bids.

"You try to develop a rhythm to your chant," he explains, adding that consistency is a key factor.

Buchanan takes most of his merchandise on a consignment basis — he receives a percentage of the amount that each item brings in. His job is to sell things on behalf of his clients, and it is a job that he seems to take extremely seriously.

"A good auctioneer is supposed to have clarity, he's supposed to have rhythm, he's supposed to be able to represent the product," he says. "I work with selling the product for the seller. That's my job."

Buchanan occasionally has help from his audience in selling a product, as was the case at his most recent auction. An upright piano was the item up for bid, and the auctioneer asked the audience if anyone would like to demonstrate its quality. One good-natured bidder, urged on by his wife, sat down cautiously at the keyboard and then effortlessly let go with a boogie-woogie ragtime tune. The piano sold for \$375.

"I was fortunate that that guy got up and played the piano. It was a classic act," Buchanan reflects later. "It was really great. And that helped the product."

This mild-mannered auctioneer says he's careful to tell it like it is at an auction, pointing out any flaws in the merchandise that he is aware of.

"If it's a broken lamp, I'm going to sell it as a broken lamp," he explains. "I don't want to disillusion anybody that way. Hopefully my reputation will carry further as selling good merchandise."

However, Buchanan emphasizes that one of the key principles of auctions is the implicit understanding that all sales are final.

"Auctions are as is, where is,



A building in downtown Bryan which once housed Howell and Co. Wholesale Groceries is now home to some of auctioneer A.L. "Buck" Buchanan II's sales.

chanan has his work cut out for him.

For some, the job would seem hectic, or frustrating at best. But for this auctioneer, it's a way of life.

"I'll sell just about anything," Buchanan says with a twinkle in his eye. "I do it for a living. This is all I do."

"I've kind of been a scavenger, in a way, ever since I was old enough to walk," Buchanan begins matter-of-factly. "I'm doing what comes natural to me, more or less."

He says he became interested in auctioneering about eight years ago when he and his father would hold promotional auctions twice a year at their feed store.

"When I was seriously thinking about getting into the business, I checked in with a few people, and I couldn't find the

necessary for him to go out and "beat the bushes" looking for business. He says he relies largely on word of mouth and recommendations from friends.

"I talk auction to everybody ... and I follow up on everything that I hear," he explains. "The jobs aren't that easy to find."

Buchanan says he keeps an eye out for businesses in trouble that might need to have a bankruptcy auction, and he also keeps in touch with attorneys in the event that they need an auctioneer to host an estate sale.

"I really knock on doors for the business," he says.

To learn the tricks of the trade, Buchanan says he attended a local school for auctioneers. It was there that he learned to count — auction style. He says that there are 186 printed filler words that auc-