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Call them what you will: publicists, PR people or even flacks. But it's the job of public relations professionals to make sure their clients get seen and heard.

Longtime Montecito resident Milton Kahn has one of the most valuable traits for a publicist -- boundless enthusiasm.

"I love being a PR person," he recently told the News-Press, while sitting at a desk in his Montecito office, just a few steps away from his home. "I love the idea of the good news that comes with being a PR person, breaking a big story in USA Today or People magazine or a headline story on a wire service.

"Each story is different. Each campaign is different. Every author has a different personality. It's very, very exciting to me."

He spent more than three decades in Hollywood representing industry types, from little-known ingenues to full-blown celebs, producers and screenwriters, before transitioning to the world of book publishing in the mid-1990s.

Among his A-list clients were actors Gregory Peck, Glenn Ford and Chuck Norris; director and producer Michael Landon; composer Herb Alpert; and that king of the B movie, Roger Corman, according to Mr. Kahn.

The Brooklyn native has always had a knack for promotion. As a basketball-loving teenager, he won a full athletic scholarship to a private high school in Greenwich, Conn., after waging a letter-writing campaign in his junior year to more than two dozen schools.

"I just loved playing basketball," he said. "I would dribble my basketball to school every morning, then play. That and movies and, of course, television." (To this day, he shoots hoops with his 20-something assistant at least once a week.)

Mr. Kahn was a journalism major at Ohio University, but "I basically went to college to kill time," he confessed. "I knew I had promotional skills but I had no idea what I was going to do after college."

By chance, Richard Linke, a PR agent from Capitol Records, gave a talk at the college just before graduation. Through the agent, he got an interview with the William Morris Agency in New York City.

That year in the mailroom was an eye-opener. "It was a Rhodes scholarship, working at that place," mused Mr. Kahn. "It was the best place to learn about the entertainment industry."

"Within a very short period of time, I was representing Roger Corman and Michael Landon."

What did an old-school PR guy do exactly? "My job was to create a strong image for them ... basically keep the momentum going and create an awareness," he said.

He set up interviews and secured stories and mentions in columns through his connections, in particular gunning for placements in the industry "bibles," Variety and The Hollywood Reporter.

"I was hired by a lot of clients to target the people in the entertainment industry and make them aware of their presence and also national publications such as, People, Time, Newsweek, etc..."

Some of his other better-known clients have included film director Arthur Hiller (of "Love Story" fame), screenwriter Joe Stefano ("Psycho"), writing team Link and Levinson ("Columbo," "Murder She Wrote"), and comedian Steve Allen, said Mr. Kahn.

And among the films he's publicized are "Fried Green Tomatoes," "The Tin Drum," Fellini's "Amarcord," Ron Howard's "Grand Theft Auto," "The Wild Angels," and Kurosawa's "Dersu Uzala" and Bruce Beresford's "Breaker Morant," according to the publicist.

In the 1980s, he sold his home in Beverly Hills and moved with his wife, Bridget, and two stepsons to Montecito. The couple fell in love with Santa Barbara while spending weekend getaways at the San Ysidro Ranch and the Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara.

For about eight years, he commuted to his office on Sunset Boulevard, spending Tuesdays through Thursdays in L.A. to meet with show business clients. Then he started transitioning into book publishing, in part to cut down on the time he had to spend in traffic.

Nowadays, "I dread going to L.A., really," he said.

His home-based business, Milton Kahn Associates Inc., is almost entirely focused on the publishing industry. One of the first books he promoted was ice hockey player Gordie Howe's 1995 self-published autobiography, "and... Howe!", which sold its first print run of 100,000 copies, said Mr. Kahn.

Other clients have included authors like James Halperin ("The Truth Machine"), Stanley Alpert ("The Birthday Party: A Memoir of Survival"), J.A. Jance ("Day of the Dead" and "Exit Wounds"), children's writer Stephen Huneck ("Sally Goes To the Beach"), and "The World Almanac Book of Records."

As for the future, "my goal is to work till I'm 100," he said, eyes beaming. "I would. I look forward every day to my job.

"The bottom line is I love people. I love meeting them and getting to know them." And, one could say, getting other people to know them, too.

THE CORMAN CONNECTION

Publicist Milton Kahn's chance meeting with Roger Corman in 1963 resulted in a long working relationship with the then low-budget director-producer that lasted through the early 1990s. The founder of New World Pictures went on to release cult classics like "Death Race 2000," "Piranha" and "Children of the Corn," and produced more than 550 films.

"He's the best publicist I've ever worked with and particularly good about taking a small story and working it up into a major event," Mr. Corman told the News Press. "He always told the truth but somehow the truth became bigger and bigger as he referred to it."

One of Mr. Kahn's proudest moments was watching this year's Academy Awards, where Mr. Corman received an honorary Oscar for his lifetime contributions to film.