

# Greetings!

## Moderne cards mark all occasions

By SCOTT WILLIAMS  
*Correspondent*

THIRTY-THREE YEARS AGO, when William Harris first entered the greeting card business, the average card sold for a nickel. Harris estimates that the average card today costs between 40 and 50 cents.

"It's a fad that caught on and grew," says Harris. "I think a caveman wrote a sentiment on a rock someplace and that started it. That was the first greeting card."

Harris is the founder and owner of Moderne Greeting Cards, which has been located at 3855 N. Lincoln for the past 20 years. Within the modest three-story building, Harris' company handles every aspect of the business (except for printing), from folding the cards to packaging and shipping.

IN ADDITION to supplying retailers nation wide, Moderne exports to countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, as well as to Canada and Puerto Rico. Harris estimates that they ship out "many tens of thousands" of cards every day.

Harris calls Moderne "a medium-sized company," compared to the greeting card giants like Hallmark and American Greetings, who "eat up a big share of the total volume."

Unlike other greeting card corporations, Moderne primarily deals with "everyday cards." Harris says that the largest seller year-around is the birthday card. Other Moderne specialties include friendship, anniversary, thank-you and get-well cards.

HOW DOES a company like Moderne stay in business alongside the big guys like Hallmark? "We've been in business a long time, and we have rolled with the punches over the years. Times change—you have to change your style, your methods and your product in order to keep up.

"We make a better product," says Harris. "We have some good sales people working for us, some good promotional things, and we make the most popular type of cards.

"We don't go in there and compete with Hallmark. We're a specialty house. Stores come to us for our specialty. And we're good at it—we should be."

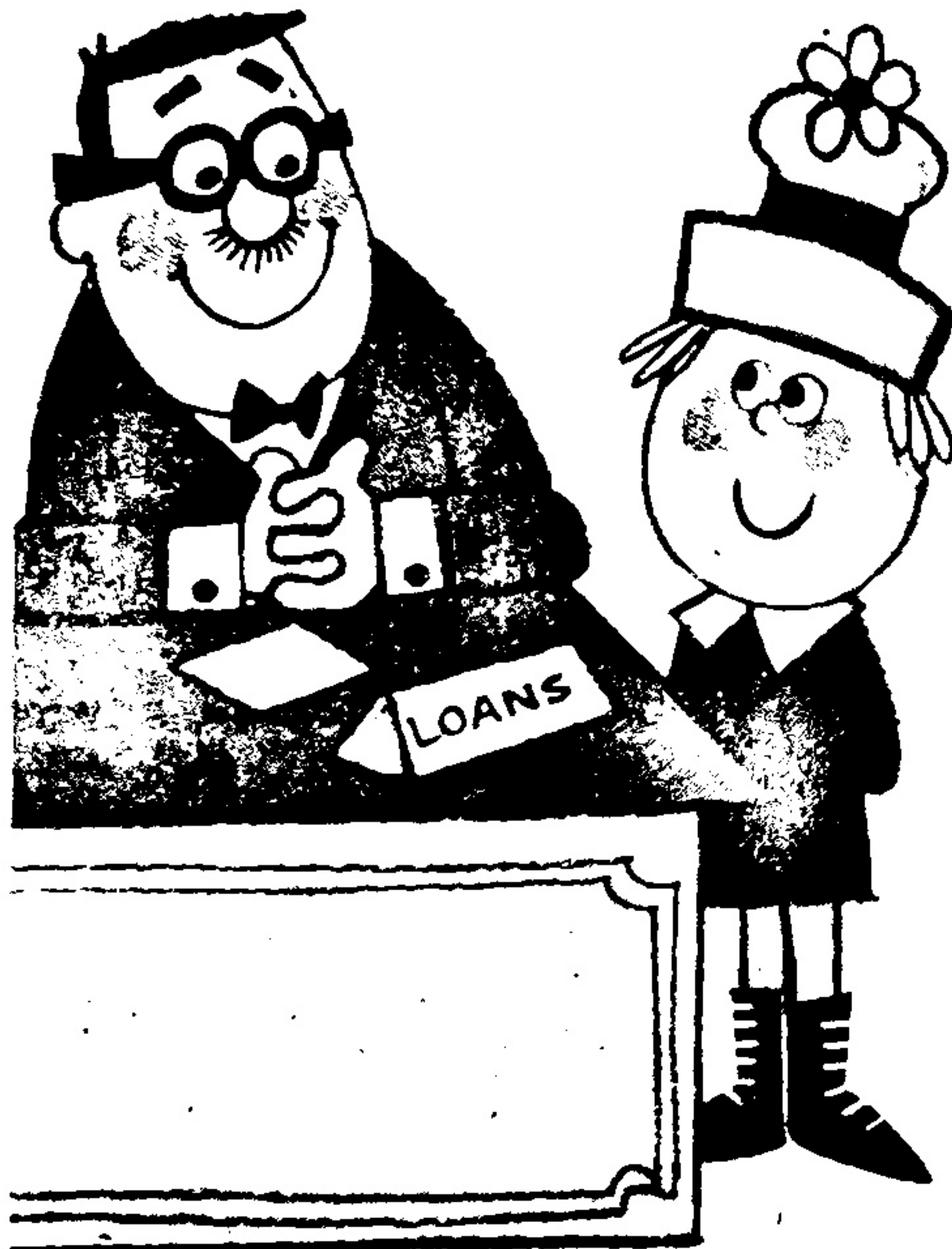
IN THE PAST two decades, Harris has used diverse approaches of selling, including mail order, distributors and food brokerage firms. Currently he employs a sales staff of hundreds, some of whom are working in foreign countries. The salesmen earn 20% commission per order.

Harris, in part, attributes the rising popularity of greeting cards to inflation. "In times like these, they can't afford to send presents, so they send a card instead."

But, he adds, inflation is also making it increasingly difficult for a business to prosper. "It's very tough to make a sufficient profit today. It gets to the point where at the end of the year, you're doing terrific volume, business is good, but it's hard to make money because of the increased costs of doing business."

Nevertheless, Harris and his company are demonstrating that a "medium-sized company" can take the plunge into competition and still stay afloat.

I WANTED TO BUY YOU  
a CHRISTMAS GIFT  
SO I WENT TO THE  
BANK FOR a LOAN  
AND THE BANKER  
TOLD ME EXACTLY  
WHAT TO DO ....



THE PUNCH line of this Moderne Card Co. Christmas card shows the little boy flying a kite. Although the price of cards has escalated along with inflation, cards remain a popular form of greeting on special occasions.