

BANANA MAN GETTING RICH

Free Enterprise (and Money) in Favor With Most Hippies

BY DAVE FELTON

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Despite what you might have heard, most hippies speak favorably of hard work, dedication and free enterprise.

Some of them even practice it. They only require that a job offers certain "meaningful" rewards, such as creative expression, esthetic awareness, and personal integrity. Money is another good one.

In San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, some hippies on successful money trips have added so much meaning to their lives, they now can afford second cars and the most expensive guitar amplifier.

"We sell the usual hippie merchandise—jewelry, water pipes, roach (marijuana) holders," said Miss Diane Pound, 25, co-owner of Wild Colors, a shop at 1418 Haight. "Most of it is made locally, and almost all of it is bought by kids around here. We mark it up 30%."

She's Member of HIP

A graduate of Mills College, Miss Pound has been in business eight months. She is a member of HIP, Haight Independent Proprietors, a group of hippie businessmen who organized after being blackballed from the conservative Haight-Ashbury Businessmen's Assn.

"All the association ever offered us anyway were things like piped-in music on Saturdays, Guy Lombardo and junk like that," said Miss Pound.

In the store's back room, her business partner, Peter Krug, was working with what he hoped would some day be another source of income, a rock 'n roll band.

"A lot of guys around here have mental jobs, messenger bike boys, delivery men," he said. "Actually, half of the Haight-Ashbury economy comes from the post office."

The post office?

Hundreds Employed

"Oh yeah, a lot of hippies work here; this is where we manufacture them," said Sam Franco, secretary to the director of operations, Rincon Annex post office. "We've hired several hundred; you can see them around noon, eating lunch outside."

"They're good workers, not too much trouble. The thing is the hair—we can't restrict or bar them from growing beards and long hair."

"Complaints come in all the time. We get phone calls every day. All we can tell 'em is these people are entitled to rights just like everyone else. We only require that they look halfway clean and halfway decent; if they want to grow a beard, that's up to them."

One hippie businessman, who wears neither beard nor long hair, is

Larry Starin, 26-year-old former junior executive who quit his New York job last year and came to the Haight-Ashbury.

A month ago, he was broke and out of work. Today, he is making a small fortune as head of the Mellow Yellow Co., a firm which, according to its \$250 state business permit, "sells processed bananas."

Peel Powder Popular

Actually Starin sells, mostly by mail, the powder of baked banana peels. When smoked, it produces a mild, mellow high, similar to weak marijuana. The main thing is it's completely legal.

"Let's face it, I sell dope," he said proudly. "This is every hippie's fantasy—Come down in the morning, get my money and leave. I have nothing against money, I think it's great. I get to sleep late."

Currently Starin is raking in \$300 a day in orders from around the country. He charges \$5 per half ounce of mellow yellow, and he figures \$50 in bananas yields about \$750 powder.

Starin is giving jobs to hippies by paying them to process the bananas. The banana "meat" goes to the diggers for their free meals. However, Starin is a card-carrying capitalist at heart, and said he may have to start hiring non-hippies. "The thing about hippies is their reliability factor is not too good," he said.

He Has a Lawyer

Starin also employs a lawyer, an accountant and an answering service. His office, at 2077 Hayes St. has no furniture and only one piece of office equipment—a yellow telephone. Starin answered it, talked to a customer and hung up.

"Guy wants to know if the stuff's guaranteed," he said. "I told him I had confidence in my product." Starin giggled.

"I'm not going to be in the Swiss bank crowd for a while, but I've got my rent covered. I just want to buy a farm. I'm going to grow mushroom rooms for one thing—strange kinds of mushrooms."

After the banana fad is over, he said he is going to market other legal and fruity narcotics.

"We're gonna sell grapefruit peels and orange peels and herbs and roots and mushrooms. We're gonna have a Rotary Club like nothing you've ever seen—Just sit back and watch everybody get stoned."

Next: Music, psychedelic art and what city officials say now about the expected hippie invasion of San Francisco this summer.