

Bass has made the best of his opportunities

By **ROBIN BARKSDALE**
Chronicle Staff Writer

In two years, Marshall Bass will retire from RJR Nabisco Inc. with the confidence that he has made the very best of the opportunities offered him. By his personal definition of success, he will have "succeeded."

His retirement has officially been announced and will become effective Jan. 1, 1991. Until that time, Bass said he will serve in a "consulting" capacity and also will continue with most of his current duties as senior vice president of the corporation. His retirement from Reynolds also will mean the conclusion of not one, but two careers.

"I spent one career in the military and have some very interesting experiences from that," said the 62-year-old Bass. "When I retire from RJR, I shall have had 24 years here. I've had two full careers and rather responsible positions in both."

A native of Goldsboro, Bass was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army. By the age of 34, he was lieutenant and commanded a battalion combat team during the Korean War. He became chief of Army promotions at the Pentagon after he left Korea. During his tenure with the Army, Bass earned a Legion of Merit, three Army commendation medals, the Purple Heart and the Combat Infantryman's Badge. But after 23 years of military life, Bass decided to ply his talents in the corporate arena.

Business, he said, was not necessarily a foreign territory for him. Although it's somehow difficult to imagine the corporate giant in anything other than an executive environment, Bass said he remembers clearly his very first occupation.

"I sold Afro-Americans (news-papers). I sold newspapers when I was eight years old. That's the first job I ever had," he said. "The papers sold for 10 cents each and I made 2 cents off every paper I sold."

Bass had a client list of 100 customers and said he quickly learned that he could earn more by selling other papers and expanding his product line.

Bass came to RJR in 1968 when he accepted a position as manager of personnel development. The first Afro-American manager at the company, he was responsible for the company's federal contract compliance program, the EEO career development and general personnel management.

In 1970, he was promoted to manager of personnel development for the newly-formed R.J. Reynolds

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industries. He was elected vice president in 1982 and, in 1986, was named senior vice president.

With his retirement now on the horizon, Bass said that it naturally will be difficult to leave the work that he has done for nearly a quarter of a century. But his presence will still be felt at the company despite his official retirement.

"It's difficult to walk away from an occupation if one has committed himself or herself to it for a period of time," said Bass, who received his bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland. "I suppose that when I formally retire, there will be an adjustment period. But I don't intend to stop being a part of a lot of the things I am currently involved with."

Bass plans to be anything but idle after his official retirement. Among his plans are establishing a relationship with Winston-Salem State University, "because I believe that I want to share, in a college environment, some of the things I have learned over the years. I also plan to play as much tennis as I can. Tennis is something I enjoy. I love the game. I don't expect to become inactive as long as I am blessed with good health."

Bass said that he would term his career "successful," because he has his own definition of success by which he measures. Succeeding, he



Marshall Bass is a successful man, not only by the standards of society, but -- more importantly -- by his own personal definition of success.

Photo by Charmane Delaverson

said, is not based on setting long-range goals and then either meeting them or falling short. Bass said he defines success in more immediate terms.

"To be the very best I could in the job I was assigned to do at the time. That's my definition of success," he said. "That's significant and important to my whole way of thinking. Being able to perform effectively in the tasks or job one is currently assigned. I don't look at the next job. If one is doing well in what he or she is doing, then decisions are made about how one will perform at a higher level. Do well in whatever you're doing and generally one will be rewarded for what one does."

But Bass said success doesn't just fall into an individual's lap. It depends on an important quality.

"Success means being able to recognize an opportunity when it presents itself," said Bass, a member of several boards of directors. "That's important. Timing is so very important. If one is not able to know when it is time to take advantage of an opportunity, one is a failure."

And knowing when the time is right, Bass said, depends on the "sum total of one's life's experiences," but mostly on faith.

"I believe very strongly in a prayerful approach to life," said Bass, a licensed lay leader and chalice bearer in the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. "One must have a relationship, in my case, with God or Jesus Christ, but something big-

ger than him or herself. You have to have faith and you have to have expectations that this is the right thing to do. Faith without expectations is not a good experience. You must have a sense of preparedness to move on and you have to believe it is time for it."

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Bass said that it would be easy for him to say that his motivation to be the best stems from his experiences in corporate America, from his years in college or from having pulled combat duties in the Korean War. But it would also be false, he said. The source of his inspiration is much closer to home.

"My father died when I was four years old. I think of my mother in very reverent terms," said Bass, one of 11 children. "If I had to look at any one person in terms of defining what life is all about, it would certainly have to be my mother."

Although offered many other opportunities during his career, Bass turned them all down to remain with Reynolds. The company, he said, provided him the opportunity to succeed, and he never wanted anything more.

"What kept me here was the opportunity to succeed. I'd really have to say it was the opportunity to

do the best job I could. I have had that opportunity with RJR," said Bass. "Of course, there have been other things such as superior management and other things that I could have gotten with someone else. I could sit here and say any

number of things. But it has not been such things as 'I like Winston-Salem' or 'I like this town,' or 'I didn't have opportunities elsewhere.' It has been that *this* company has given me the opportunity to succeed. I could sit here and say any

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