



## **Augie Grasis III, Founder Handmark**

Kansas City, Missouri  
[www.handmark.com](http://www.handmark.com)

In 1985 Augie Grasis founded the first company to create home and landscape design software for PCs. After a couple of years, he started looking for the next big thing. According to Augie, “the next thing was people being mobile.” He talks about building the applications business from the ground up in Kansas City, Missouri.

“We started out publishing Scrabble and Monopoly for PDAs in the early 2000s. But then wireless devices became powerful enough to do other things besides voice. So we said to ourselves, ‘What’s going to be the next killer app?’

“We started building applications that were connected — sports, maps, movie listings and news through the Wall Street Journal and Forbes. Now we have 2 million users of our Pocket Express which is a consolidation of those things.

“Handmark is a global name. We’re starting to translate into different languages. And we partner with companies like Nokia and Samsung. Those guys are worldwide.”

Grasis talks about building a successful business during economic downturn.

“We’re happy things have worked out well. People are so excited about doing more with their mobile devices, and that transcends the economy.

“It’s been real interesting to watch our customers get younger. When we started out with our PDAs, it was white males age 45, because they were the techno-geek early adopters. Today it’s a move down to young business people. It’s everybody.

“We’ve built strong partnerships with the carriers — Sprint, AT&T and Verizon — and with the handset companies — Motorola, Blackberry, Samsung. But you can’t just build a cool phone. It’s what the phone does. And what the phone does is software. That’s what we make. So the handset companies need us just like we need them. The carriers need us just like we need them. We’re the ones who make the phone hum.

“If you think about it, it’s like media space. For example, the Wall Street Journal people don’t know the people at Sprint. If WSJ wants to publish their newspaper on mobile devices, they’ll have to navigate all those changing waters, because every day there’s a new operating system or there’s a new phone. It’s a complex world out there. But you get us together with carriers and handset companies, and it’s a win-win-win.”

Handmark is delighted to have Sprint right in their back yard. But there’s more to Kansas City. Augie Grasis might well be the region’s best spokesperson.

"It helps to be in Kansas City, because there are enough tech companies here to attract the talent we need. There are a bunch of great companies turning out great tech people. And yet it's not so big that people are running across the street to change jobs every month. We've never had trouble recruiting someone to work here.

"The cost of living is great, too. Your kids are safe. There are good schools. One of our top executives was working for us out in Los Altos, California. And he came to us and said, "Please let me move there." He's been in Kansas City 3 or 4 years now, and he loves it. I don't think you could get him to leave.

"Twenty minutes from work I can be on my sailboat or on a country road with my bike. From a cycling standpoint, we have some fabulous rolling hills, which are difficult, but not 'killer.' We have nice people, too, who won't run you off the road. Every Saturday a group meets in my driveway, and we bike 25 miles to Dearborn, Missouri for breakfast, then ride back on beautiful, well-maintained farm roads. I love being here!"