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PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Published authors Mark St. Amant, Tracy McArdle, and John Hargrave (from left) say their bosses at Arnold Worldwide supported their extracurricular work.

# Three's company

A local ad agency encourages emerging authors on its staff

By Ethan Gilsdorf  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Tracy McArdle's new book, "Real Women Eat Beef," begins with a parody of a wedding announcement: "Jillian Campbell-Marks . . . was wed today to her new job as Senior Creative Director, Branding Solutions at the Boston advertising and branding agency Wiseman/Connor." The announcement ends: "This will not be the

firm's first marriage. Jill couldn't be happier."

But McArdle, 38, hasn't had to file for divorce to seek creative fulfillment. As a vice president in the Entertainment Group at Arnold Worldwide, the Boston-based advertising agency, she has found marital bliss with her job, publishing two novels with Downtown Press/Pocket Books, the previous of which was 2005's "Confessions

of a Nervous Shiksa."

McArdle isn't the only ad exec to have struck that elusive balance between corporate and artistic identities. Over at Arnold, a funny thing is happening. The advertising behemoth is breeding authors.

Three employees have been moonlighting as authors while slumming it in the corporate trenches. Mark St. Amant's new

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# Ad agency proves its workers have the write stuff

## ► AUTHORS

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book, "Just Kick It: Tales of an Underdog, Over-Age, Out-of-Place, Semi-Pro Football Player," published in October, is the follow-up to his 2004 "Committed: Confessions of a Fantasy Football Junkie" (both published by Scribner). John Hargrave's "Prank the Monkey: The Zug Book of Pranks" (Citadel), based on practical jokes he began on his comedy website, zug.com, came out this month.

Arnold Worldwide, it turns out, encourages their efforts. But at first, McArdle was nervous to tell her supervisor she was working on a book.

"I thought it would jeopardize my career," said the Bedford native who, after a dozen years in entertainment publicity in New York and Los Angeles, moved back to Boston in 2002, freelanced for a time, then landed a job with Arnold in 2003. "It was so eye-opening and rewarding to learn they respect creativity."

Not just respect: The company practically pushed her out the door, giving her an unpaid leave to promote the first book, and inviting her to take part in one of their "Make" seminars, where McArdle spoke on her struggles finding time to write and negotiating the world of publishing. This month the company sponsors another in-house event to showcase all three authors.

"We are full of creative people at this agency, regardless of title. This creativity does find a way to express itself inside and outside the office," said Jamie Tedford, McArdle's manager. "[Writing] is part of who [Tracy] is. That came long before her occupation, and certainly long, long before her new occupation, motherhood."

Currently on maternity leave, McArdle lives a suburban life in Carlisle with, as she put it, "a horse, dog, cat, goat, and very, very supportive husband." Her book happened to be perfectly timed

with another important launch: Her first baby, Ryder, born Jan. 13, which was 10 days after "Real Women Eat Beef" hit the bookstores.

How did McArdle find time to write? "Nights, weekends, holidays, planes, and hotels."

McArdle, Hargrave, and St. Amant recently gathered in a sleek, 20th-floor conference room at Arnold's downtown headquarters to discuss their peripatetic roads to literary success. The way has not been easy.

St. Amant, 39, who was born and raised in Wellesley, joked that at a previous employer he used a screensaver decoy to keep up appearances. "I had to hide what I did," said St. Amant, who lives in South Boston with his wife, Celia, and 6-month-old daughter. To write his first book, he quit Arnold once; still, they took him back as a freelancer.

During the second stint, he was rehired full time with Arnold, where he is now an associate creative director. He has appreciated his employer's flexibility to let him go "off and do some things outside of business," whether or not it's directly applicable to his work. "Not that we spend all our time on the job [on our books]."

St. Amant's boss wouldn't mind too terribly much. "They know enough to get their work done. They love that, too. We have very intelligent folks here. We trust them," Pete Favat, chief creative officer at Arnold Boston, said in an e-mail interview. Encouraging his people to "flip over every stone to do things you haven't done," as Favat put it, can be good for business. "It gives our folks a chance to use muscles that their jobs don't ask for."

That's helpful, because the old, staid system of ad executives and account managers each doing their narrow task is gone. "It's a fading hierarchy," McArdle said. "Everybody has to be everything." Novelists, memoirists, and humor-



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"Working here makes us all savvy, savvier than the poor, hapless, first-time authors," says Tracy McArdle, with Mark St. Amant (left) and John Hargrave.

ists happen to make excellent copywriters, and writing press releases has been more than one reporter's route to a career in journalism. Managers need to be hip to the changes and let their proteges run with out-of-the-box ideas. "It helps me become a better

worker," St. Amant said, citing Arnold's creative culture as fostering well-rounded employees. "Gone are the days when you have a Mr. Slate yelling at you." Plus, his extracurricular football expertise — books, blogging for The New York Times, and a three-year stint as a

place-kicker for the Boston Panthers semipro football team — gives him credibility when working with clients.

When Arnold took on an ESPN campaign about fantasy football, the company could boast, "Listen, we got the guy who is the ex-

pert," said St. Amant. "Getting paid to do this, it's crazy." St. Amant not only works on ESPN's account; he also appears on ESPN.

The street is two-way. Corporate marketing experience with clients ranging from McDonald's to Procter & Gamble is invaluable for writers, especially new ones.

"Working here makes us all savvy," McArdle said, "savvier than the poor, hapless, first-time authors."

Hargrave, who directs Arnold's interactive projects, said the strategies he learned working for an account like Vonage were directly applicable to marketing "Prank the Monkey." "I realized that the traditional way of promoting a book is wrong," said the 37-year-old Needham resident, who has appeared on Comedy Central, "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno," and the BBC. He wants his readers to be able to order his book "in two clicks" from his website. "I've learned so much about sales and marketing that's come full circle."

Building an in-house audience at the firm isn't a bad way to kick off the book launch, either. When St. Amant has an upcoming event, he said, "I can send an e-mail blast to 800, 900 employees. A lot of companies wouldn't let you use company resources for that sort of thing." Plus, bosses tend to buy tons of books.

All that's missing, it seems, is sleep.

"At this moment, I'm exhausted. It's been three years of nonstop work bringing this thing to life," Hargrave, the father of two young boys, posted to his blog on Feb. 2, in the middle of a book tour. "And as much work as it was — holding down a full-time job, a family, a website, and a book simultaneously — I was kind of sad when the process was over."

And when it is over? The consensus: Don't quit your day job.

"There's a misconception that once you publish a book: Beep, beep, back up the Brinks truck," said St. Amant.

"Your life doesn't change," said McArdle. "It just gets busier."

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