A PRIVATE PERSON

By most accounts, those who know Matthew Stuller acknowledge that he is intensely averse to publicity, and prefers to maintain his anonymity whenever possible. The owner of Stuller Settings declined to be interviewed for this article, delegating the task to company spokesman Steve MacDiarmid. A visit to Stuller Settings confirms the measures that he takes to ensure his and his company’s protection. Security measures are stringent and cover all aspects of the operation.

“Matt is a private person,” says Steve MacDiarmid, director of public relations at Stuller Settings. At the same time, though, MacDiarmid adds that Stuller has a very gregarious personality. Among friends and acquaintances, he is perceived as friendly and outgoing. The nature of his business, however, apparently dictates that he stay out of the public eye.

Stuller would probably not be pegged by most people as the owner of a company that chalks up annual sales in excess of $60 million. He’s accomplished a lot for someone who turns 40 this year, and he invariably attributes his success to his employees.

“He does recognize what is important, and that is to keep people involved and interested in their jobs,” MacDiarmid says. “It’s no problem getting motivated people in here. It’s keeping them that way.”

Stuller is driven and demanding, and he expects the same level of dedication from the people who work for him. They, on the other hand, are fiercely loyal to him. Both current and ex-employees refer to him only in the most glowing of terms.

The concept of family is important to Stuller, and he incorporates this same sort of tight-knit cohesion into the work place. The first Thursday of every month finds him in front of the entire staff to alternately discuss problems and enhance company pride by delivering accolades to deserving individuals.

MacDiarmid says that Stuller never considered locating his business anywhere other than Lafayette, for one simple reason. “This is where his family is from.” A younger sister is also employed at the firm.

Whether intentionally or not, Stuller has managed to capitalize on the low-key, good-old-boy aspect of his demeanor. “He seems to make them think that he’s a real family-oriented company,” says Cynthia Bender, associate editor of Modern Jeweler. “He kind of likes to cultivate this image as a down-home boy.

She profiled Stuller Settings in the June 1990 issue, and was frankly impressed. “I thought it was a very superior operation.” She credits him with being sharp and shrewd, but says he downplays those aspects.

Edward Buttruss and Stuller grew up together in Lafayette and both are now in the jewelry business. Buttruss says Stuller always set high goals for himself.

“Matt was always a planner and extremely well organized. When he wanted to know something, he studied up on it. He always did it right the first time. I don’t think he ever made any mistakes. And he enjoyed doing it.”

The sheer size of Stuller Settings now dictates that some of the responsibility be delegated to others, but Stuller still keeps a close watch on the entire process, says Buttruss. At one time, Stuller himself monitored a closed circuit television system to survey workers. This duty has since been delegated to security personnel to maintain visual records and act as a deterrent against possible theft, says MacDiarmid.

Stuller’s attention to detail is mind-boggling. He leaves no stone unturned in his quest for perfection. During one employee meeting, he reminded the staff that work chairs had been ergonomically designed, at considerable expense, to increase productivity. Since they were not being used correctly, he appointed a team to ensure that correct posture be employed in the future.

Much of Stuller’s knowledge is self-taught. He left USL after three semesters but remains a voracious reader, according to MacDiarmid. He is also not hesitant about consulting professionals for advice. “He’s very astute at learning from other people as well as from his own experiences. He’s not shy about bringing in experts,” MacDiarmid says.

Even Stuller probably didn’t envision the magnitude of his success when he first began selling jewelry findings from the trunk of his car in the late ’60s. He’s nurtured it every step of the way since then though.

Buttruss says, “If Matt would have looked at himself 15 years ago and tried to perceive where he would be within that time, I think he probably expected to be where he is now, but at the same time, he surprised even himself.”