

Remember Lava Lamps? Meet the guy who makes them

By: Christina Le Beau



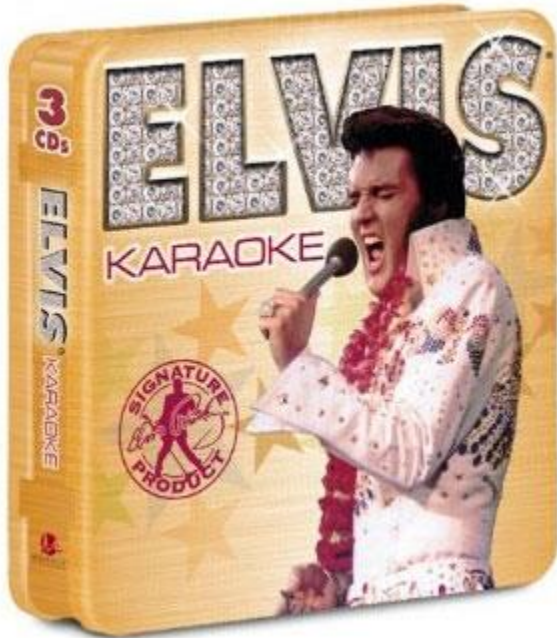
He likes to hand out his business card. "I get a kick out of the reactions."

Clay Farnsworth, 63, grew up near the original U.S. Lava Lamp factory in Lakeview and bought his first iconic bubbling light at age 15. Now he's president and CEO of Elk Grove Village-based Lava Lite, which has expanded beyond the lamps and, on March 1, will be renamed Lifespan Brands. Farnsworth and his wife live in Arlington Heights. They have two grown children and a grandson.



What did you want to be when you were a kid? An entertainer. I sang, played the guitar and wrote songs, and did a mean Elvis impression. I still do. If there's ever a party with a karaoke machine, I have to do Elvis.

I hear you've got a photographic memory for movie trivia. Before the Internet, people would call me and say, "Who won the Oscar in whatever year?" I have about 4,000 films in my collection. The neighborhood kids used to come and borrow movies like it was a video store.



A hunk, a hunk of burnin' love

Do you have favorite genres? I'm a real lover of films by Billy Wilder, Hitchcock, Spielberg, William Wyler. I also have every Elvis Presley film ever made. He did 31 feature films and two concert films.

Favorite movie featuring a Lava Lamp? "Big" with Tom Hanks. When he moves into an apartment, it has bunk beds and there's a Lava Lamp.

Pick one: hardware store or home decor store. Home decor, because I am not really technical and I like to competitive shop. I love going out on Black Friday. I put together a store attack plan.

Seriously? I get energized by it; it's fun. Also, I get to visit stores and watch people buy our stuff. I'll sometimes go up to people and say, "Hi, I'm the president of Lava" and hand them a business card. I get a kick out of their reactions.