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## Company man

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## Company man

Visitors to the eighth floor office tower of insurance giant AFLAC in Columbus, Ga., probably wouldn't expect to see life-size cutouts of KISS bassist Gene Simmons and lead singer Paul Stanley staring them in the face as they step off the elevator.

But cardboard versions of the legendary, makeup-clad, heavy-metal musicians once greeted guests to AFLAC's department of field force development — when it was headed by company scion Tripp Amos, a 1992 Furman graduate.

"At sales meetings I've dressed up as Gene Simmons and spit up the blood," says Tripp, who keeps KISS posters on the walls of his current office. "I've always loved KISS. When I'm introduced at a corporate event, they always play a KISS song.

"I know it doesn't fit the mold," he says.

The 33-year-old Amos is now responsible for sales in five eastern states at AFLAC. The company was founded as the American Family Life Assurance Company in 1955 by Tripp's uncles, John and Paul Amos, and his grandfather, Bill Amos. The seller of supplemental disability, health and life insurance is probably best known for its humorous TV commercials featuring an "AFLAC"-quacking duck. The duck has helped AFLAC boost its U.S. sales as much as 30 percent a year and its yearly revenue to more than \$10 billion.

Yet while it is making inroads domestically, AFLAC's bread and butter is selling cancer insurance to the Japanese. "We insure one in every four Japanese," Tripp says. "Cancer in Japan is what heart disease is in the United States."

Many Furman students enter college undecided about what to declare as their major or what career they will pursue. Few know where they will be employed once they graduate. But that wasn't the case with Tripp. Because of AFLAC's huge presence in

## Amos follows family tradition at insurance giant AFLAC



**Tripp Amos has brought the sights and sounds of KISS to AFLAC headquarters in Columbus, Ga.**

Japan, he participated in Furman's study-abroad program in Japan. Like nearly everything else he did at Furman, the trip was designed to prepare him for a career at AFLAC.

"I've always known I was going to do this," Tripp says, explaining that he spent much of his energy at Furman studying or hanging out with friends. "I wasn't that great of a contributor at Furman. I'd love to say I was class president. I never had an office with FUSAB. I wasn't in a fraternity."

But Tripp isn't just a health-insurance geek. Because he's also interested in professional sports, he bought a minority stake in the Columbus Wardogs, an arenafootball2 franchise that plays in the minor leagues of organized indoor football. Like many minor-league sports franchises, the team's future in Columbus is uncertain, but attendance has been better than average.

In addition to improving the quality of life in Columbus, Tripp says he's simply a sports fan who thought it would be fun to own a team in his hometown. "I don't hunt, I don't play golf, so that's my hobby," he says.

The Amos family, whose management style has helped AFLAC earn a spot in *Fortune* magazine's rankings of the best places to work, has a history of helping its hometown, says Tom

Triplitt, alumni director at Furman and a native of Columbus.

"When I think about the Amos family, it's with admiration," says Triplitt, who attended Columbus High School with AFLAC chair and chief executive Dan Amos. "I admire their entrepreneurial spirit and their work ethic and what they've done to put Columbus on the map."

Tripp, who's married to 1992 Furman graduate Jenifer Clifton, is one of numerous family members who work for AFLAC. Dan Amos is the son of Tripp's uncle, Paul. Tripp also has two younger cousins who work for the company as sales coordinators.

Tripp's career trajectory suggests he's destined for a top position at the company. He now travels to Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia to meet with state and regional sales managers. (Dan Amos ran the company's operations in Alabama and the Florida panhandle for a decade). But Tripp doesn't want to speculate about his future movement on the AFLAC career ladder.

"Nothing is guaranteed to me. It's not how it works here, that 'He's an Amos, so he'll be the next CEO,'" he says. "We're publicly owned and the Amoses don't own 50 percent of the company. We answer to Wall Street analysts just like everyone else does."

For the time being, Tripp is content trying to improve sales and marketing in his five states — using KISS, of course, as a primary point of inspiration.

"Gene Simmons is the best marketer in this country," he says. "They're a rock-and-roll band with lunch boxes and record players and underwear and a pinball machine. You can even buy a KISS coffin."

— Andy Peters '92

*The author is the Atlanta bureau chief for The Macon Telegraph.*