

# Financial war dispatches popular Newsletter leaves Ruff Times in move to Survival

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PLEASANTON, Calif. — Is it his new record album of "songs of country, money, family love and inspiration?" Or maybe because he ghost writes for his 7-month-old daughter?

Whatever the attraction, Howard J. Ruff's weekly "dispatches from the financial war room" have more subscribers than any other newsletter of its kind.

In its eight years, the newsletter, originally called "Ruff Times," has been criticized by economists, other financial advisers and business journalists.

Ruff recently moved his \$17 million operation from cramped offices to spacious ones in a Pleasanton industrial park.

Target Inc. is the umbrella company for Ruff's weekly newsletter, Financial Survival Report and a conservative political lobbying effort called Free the Eagle.

There, 85 young college graduates with business and accounting backgrounds answer 600 to 800 daily telephone calls from some of his 165,000 subscribers seeking investment advice.

Ruff, the family man who approaches his employees and subscribers like a father, is what they buy. Along one corridor at Target Inc. are more than 21 photographs of Ruff alone or at speaking engagements or television interviews.

Ruff's investment philosophy centers on investing in gold, silver and other precious metals and practicing the Mormon religious tenant of food storage.

The advice, strident and simply written,

has changed as the bear stock market evolved into a roaring bull. Ruff, a former professional singer, claims he's not changing his tune.

"I'll invest in anything that is appropriate for the the economic cycle we're in," said Ruff. "I don't care for anything that doesn't make money."

With the precious metals market relatively stagnant, Ruff chooses stocks for the short term. However, he places his trust in gold and predicts its current \$400 an ounce price will climb to \$2,000 an ounce before 1986.

Through it all, Ruff claims he has been maligned and misunderstood.

"Ninety percent of the stuff written about me is trash," he said.

Ruff walks around his office to ease a kink from the day's racquetball game. The room is done in neutral colors and the only decorations are two photographs, one of his large family, and the other of U.S. coins. Family and money — Ruff in a nutshell.

The 52-year-old Ruff has moved his family of 10 children and four grandchildren from Northern California to outside Provo, Utah. Usually, he travels to his California office three times a month. A college music major, Ruff minored in economics and worked full and part time for a small Denver stock brokerage in between singing gigs for the Air Force.

His first book, "How to Prosper During

the Coming Bad Years" rapidly climbed the New York Times best-seller list and earned him the moniker "prophet of doom."

"I'm not a prophet of doom, I said so 17 times in my first book," Ruff said.

In fact he changed the name of his newsletter to Financial Survival Report from Ruff Times, "because the name became a liability. It conveyed a false impression."

"I got sick of people asking me, 'How rough will times be, Howard?'" he said.

His best-seller's sequel, "Survive and Win in the Inflationary Eighties," covers the same basic premise that inflation is endemic and epidemic and here to stay for the foreseeable future.

He expects the \$205 billion federal deficit to push inflation from its current low of roughly 4 percent to beyond 18 percent by 1986.

"All the things that drove inflation to 18 percent a few years ago are still with us and in spades," he said.

Ruff used to get angry at his critics. Now, he says he doesn't care what they say. His subscribers, who pay \$69 a year for the newsletter and use of a 24-hour hotline, are loyal.

"I'm not writing for the edification of the professionals," Ruff said. "I don't care what the financial powers think. I get the red carpet when I go to see them. They know I motivate the movement of a lot of money."

And money is what he's all about.