

Workers for vision

Donna Frank (left) and Pat Hartmann, both of Birmingham, are helping in the planning for "A Night for Sight," an event being presented by the Retina Foundation at 8 p.m. Thursday, April 5. Paul Williams, Academy

Award winner and composer of such hit songs as "Evergreen," will be featured entertainer, and all proceeds will go to the foundation's Eye Research Institute. Ticket information is available by calling 353-5950.

Consumers may disdain protection that's offered

Consumers are getting more protection than they get around to using, according to a Michigan State University psychologist who teaches courses in consumer behavior.

Frederick R. Wickert, MSU professor of psychology, said some consumer protection publications, columns and television programs may be noted by consumers but all too often have relatively little influence on purchases.

"Before they are anything else," Wickert said, "consumers are individuals with their own widely varying tastes, emotions, outlooks, preferences, and ways of deciding what they want. They are, in that sense, irrational consumers, they don't necessarily buy what consumer protectionists tell them is good for them."

Consumer protection devices such as "truth in lending," unit pricing, and such came about, Wickert believes, primarily through the persistence and clout of "white knights" and "boastrokers" wanting to protect consumers, rather than through any concerted consumer push. Product dating is probably the most acceptable device, he said.

Research on consumer behavior, Wickert said, shows that price is seldom the main criterion for making purchases. Raised prices, in both the fancy "wish" and Christmas catalogs, and in the more mundane department store catalogs for shopping by mail, may increase sales, especially for snob appeal products and brands.

The MSU professor said economists and psychologists do not always agree about marketing trends, inflation results and motivation for purchasing.

Economists tend to think of buyers as rational machines, with perfect memories for prices, that buy in their own best rational interests, he said. Psychologists see buyers as human beings subject to personal likes and dislikes, frequently short of time to do anything resembling comparison shopping, and with inadequate memories for keeping track of price changes.

People who have no major purchases to make may do some hoarding of minor things, but the choices are most likely to buy again on individual preferences and the consumer's "irrational," personal, special needs, rather than on rational or price-related selection, Wickert said.

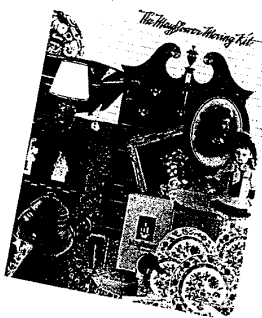
"With 8,000 items in a supermarket," Wickert said, "who can be expected to remember what a couple of dozen or more items cost last week or a month ago?"

Hoarding against inflation is done mainly in durable goods, big ticket

purchases such as houses (preferably in California and away from the hazards of canyon fires and mud slides) and cars, he said.

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