

Information please

Your opinion counts in poll of consumer products and services

By Marie McGee
staff writer

THE SIGN OVER the entrance to the Consumer Testing Center in Westland Shopping Mall says it all: Your opinion counts.

Your two cents worth could result in a million-dollar decision affecting a wide range of consumer products.

It all happens rather casually in corner of the sprawling shopping center at Newburgh and Wayne roads via random surveys conducted by Consumer Testing Services, one of 12 such centers across the U.S. owned and operated by Southfield entrepreneur Elaine Freedman. Others are in Arizona, Colorado, Washington, Mississippi, Louisiana and New York.

Monday-Saturday, during regular daytime mall business hours, the testing crew greets shoppers and invites them to give their views on certain products and services.

THE INTRODUCTION occurs in the mall proper, but the interviewing is done in the privacy of consumer testing offices. Everything is confidential. In recording the information, individual names are replaced by numbers. The interview usually ends with the interviewee receiving a token gift.

Interviews — about 100 a day — are usually about 15 minutes long and the range of products prompted assistant testing center supervisor Sandi Gagneur of Westland to comment: "You name it and we've had it."

This week, for instance, Gagneur said the center is conducting inter-

views on candy, pop, vodka, blow dryers and beer as well as testing reactions to commercials on corduroy clothing. About 100 interviews are included in each survey.

THE CLIENT USUALLY stipulates how many interviews they want done. They also say what age group should be tested and how many males and females should be questioned, she added.

A six-year employee, Gagneur said she gets personal satisfaction from her job when she sees a product make it to the market.

"We'll be driving along and I'll see a sign advertising a product and it's one we worked on. It's kind of exciting — like being on the ground floor — to know we had a hand in getting it there."

Actually, the decision is based on the

answers given by a cross-section of people who were interviewed by the testing center staff.

Accuracy of those answers is also of prime importance, according to supervisor Phyllis Bagley.

IT IS ALSO imperative that the interviewer get the correct information from the client during the interview.

"It must be specific," Bagley said. Generalities are too vague and aren't of much help to the company which may be planning to spend thousands of dollars to introduce or change a product.

For the interviewee to say they like/dislike something isn't enough. They have to tell why and be explicit. The interviewing "isn't as easy as it appears," Gagneur said. "Sometimes the interviewer has to pull the information from the person being interviewed. It's a real skill."

THE ONLY TIME actual names come into play are for validation purposes, Gagneur explained.

"To validate the material, a random spot check of the answers is done to make sure the interviewer did her job. The person interviewed is called and re-asked the questions. If the answers don't jibe with what the interviewer turned in, we know something's wrong."

That occurs infrequently, she added, and usually because the interviewer may have changed his/her mind in the

interim between the actual interview and the validation call.

One out of every 10 persons interviewed will receive a validation call.

ALL THE CURRENT staff of interviewers are women, Bagley said. "We have had men, but it doesn't always work out too well from the point of view of the people being interviewed. We do surveys on so many personal items — bras, girdles, lampoons — involving women that the women being interviewed are uncomfortable answering the questions from a man."

"Otherwise," she said, "it doesn't matter if you're male or female. You just have to be outgoing, polite with the ability to establish a rapport with the person you're talking with."

"We don't do any selling," Bagley noted. "And we have nothing whatsoever to do with the mall itself. We just rent space — like all the other stores. In fact, from time to time, the mall has asked us to do some studies for them. So, also, have some of the individual stores within the mall."

Once all the interviews have been concluded, an editing crew of Gagneur and Joann Sherman of Canton go over all the answers to check such things as

spelling and grammar. After that, the information is sent to the client-company where it is computerized and then relayed to the manufacturer.

IT'S AT THAT level that the decision is made whether or not to spend the vast amount of money it takes to launch a new product.

Interestingly, Gagneur said, most of the time none of the interviewers have any knowledge about the product being tested. "It comes in unlabeled," she added.

Established six years ago, the Westland testing center is an important link in the testing chain, Gagneur said. "That's because it's 'automotive' which means it has a good cross-section to draw from — low, middle and upper class families. We have some companies who will test here and nowhere else."

And while everyone usually enjoys giving their opinion, it won't help to start hanging around the center in hopes of being interviewed.

Then you become a "professional responder" — and that's a no-no in the business where a fresh unfettered viewpoint is what counts.

On the Sequoia

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Lynch of Farmington Hills cruised on Lake Michigan this month aboard the presidential yacht "Sequoia." First used by Herbert Hoover, the 104-foot launch had been at each president's disposal on the Potomac until it was sold by Jimmy Carter. Roosevelt planned war strategy with Winston Churchill on the yacht; it was the site of Kennedy's 48th birthday party; and Nixon used it for negotiations with Premier Brezhnev. It was recently purchased by Presidential Yacht Trust and is undergoing a multi-million dollar restoration before returning to official service.



Smokeless system introduced

"The Smokeless System," a series of classes designed to kick the smoking habit that is said to have a 96 percent end-of-class success rate, will be introduced at 7:30 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, Sept. 17-18, in Botsford Hospital's Administration and Education Center, 28500 Grand River.

The introductory sessions are without charge. The cost of the program is \$140. Each of the four skill-development sessions in the program is about 90 minutes in length. In addition there are three maintenance sessions given to reinforce the program components.

The system uses negative smoking, nutrition management, stress management and positive imagery to assist participants in safely and effectively putting out the smoke.

The Smokeless System was developed by Dr. Don Powell of American Institute for Preventive Medicine in Southfield and adopted by Botsford Hospital.

Powell holds a host of awards in the areas of physical fitness, health promotion, preventive medicine and risk-reduction intervention, both statewide and nationally.

The Smokeless System, as well as

programs called "Weight NoMore" and "Managing Stress," all designed by Powell, are given to company employees nationally, as well as in 12 local cooperating hospitals.

Parks and rec manager takes national award

Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission manager R. Eric Reickel has received a national award for his contributions to encouraging the proper use of natural resources and leisure time.

Reickel, who recently agreed to become head of the Wayne County parks system under Wayne County executive William Lucas, was presented a citation from the National Association of State Outdoor Liaison Officers. His

nomination for the award was submitted by James P. Cleary, acting director of Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

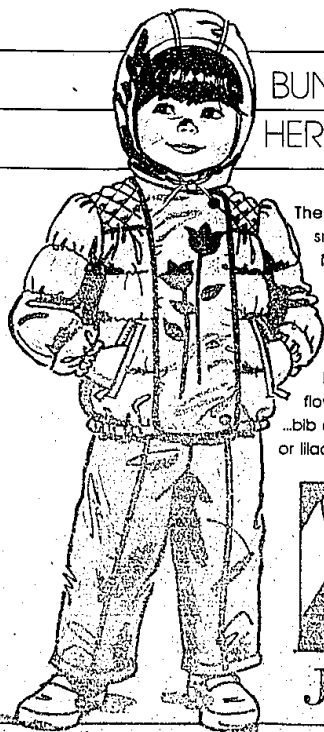
Reickel's legislative work as chairman of Michigan Recreation and Park Association Public Affairs Committee and his role in organizing recreation professionals to express their support to the U.S. Congress for land and water conservation fund appropriations were cited by Cleary in his nomination.

Promise
Someone
a Special Gift...
Blood... The
Gift of Life

American Red Cross



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Oscar & Zorric



BUNDLE
HER UP

The London Fog®

snowsuit, \$40.

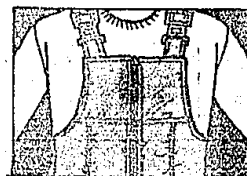
Make sure your tot is warm come winter...in this 2-piece suit of quilted nylon with acrylic pile lining.

Hooded zip-up jacket,

flower appliqued panel

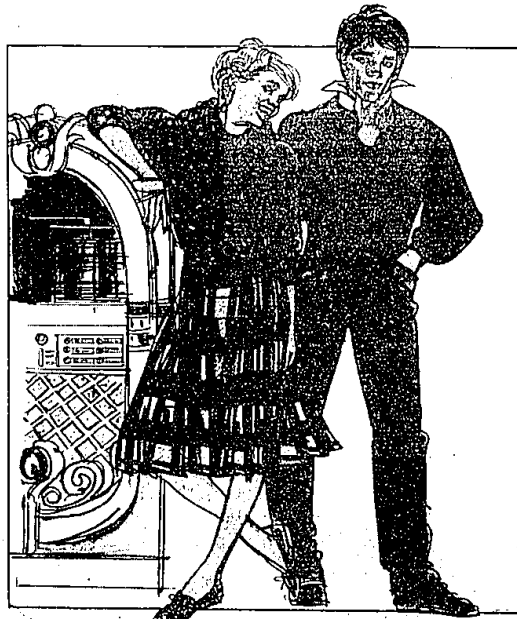
...bib overalls. Pink

or lilac, sizes 2-3-4T.



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