

Car saleswomen meet challenges head-on

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IN BURR'S CASE, she was very knowledgeable, particularly about what happens under the hood of a car. That was because of her father. "In our family," she smiled, "you weren't allowed to drive if you didn't know how to service a car."

However, all five women have had little trouble mastering mounds of information that it takes to become a successful auto salesperson.

"What is boils down to is product knowledge. Once you have that," said Wheeler, "you don't have any problems."

Training programs and a multitude of reading material available from the companies provided the basic background. After that, the women agreed, "it was trial and error."

SELLING, FOR THE most part, they said was developing an ability "to read the customer" and to be able quickly to determine individual needs. A professional demeanor is also important.

Nor has any one of them experienced any of the chauvinistic horror stories of male abuse from colleagues that one tends to associate with the traditionally male-dominated field of employment.

In fact it was quite the opposite.

"Once they know you are serious and you act professional," said one of the women, "you don't have any problems."

For Jill Bernardi, a 21-year-old Livonia resident, the experience has been enlightening.

In her first year at Livonia Chrysler-Plymouth, she expected the selling end would be "more cut throat than I is."

Since most of the agency's sales staff is young and inexperienced, a camaraderie was quickly established, but not before she showed her male colleagues an aggressive side.

SINCE THE DEALERSHIP uses an "up" system — a rotation of sales personnel in approaching customers — Bernardi, a Churchill High School graduate, recalls she "had to be aggressive. I had to win them over." Now, she says, she's "one of the guys. We all help each other."

Like Bernardi and Ostach, Wheeler didn't have any trouble landing a sales position. She learned of an opening at the dealership after her husband bought a car there after the family to Farmington from Warren.

Her background included working with a senior citizens program with the city of Warren "so I was used to working with people."

When her husband was transferred to this area,

she felt she wanted to "try her wings at something else."

In the 1 1/2 years she has been selling cars at Bob Green Chrysler, Wheeler has earned her own special niche on the staff. She became the "in-house" expert on car leasing.

"By the year 2000, 50 percent of cars will be leased. People just won't be able to afford to buy them."

FOR FRANKOWICZ and Burr, getting the job was tougher.

Frankowicz came into the sales under a special Ford Motor sales recruitment program two years ago in which the company announced its intention of hiring 60 sales people.

A graduate of Eastern Michigan University where she majored in interior design and minored in marketing. After graduation, she spent 11 years selling supermarket equipment. When she applied for the Ford sales job, she was no stranger to the competitive world of sales or competing with men.

The one-week introductory training period called for verbal as well as written testing, to be followed by personal interviews by the dealership.

In her case, it was Demmer Ford in Wayne. The dealership, however, was slow in calling her for an interview.

Frankowicz recalls "bugging" the dealership manager for a followup interview.

"I called him five days in a row. I was very persistent. I asked him to give me a chance. I had to sell myself on the phone," she said.

BURR HAD A similar experience. After graduation from a Michigan State University with a degree in landscape design, Burr said she tired of the ups and downs of seasonal employment that came with the job and decided to make a career switch. An Observer Newspapers ad led her to her apply at a Plymouth Township dealership.

"I didn't feel that the interview went very well," she recalled. However, next door was another dealership. She went in and applied and that interview went better. But still there was no job offer.

"I called every other day for three weeks. Finally, the fourth week I made it," she said.

A NATURAL REDHEAD, the 26-year-old Burr recalls that in the beginning "I was like a shadow. I listened to what all the salesmen were saying and doing."

A better opportunity prompted her recently to switch to a sales position with Bob Saks Motor Mall in Farmington Hills.

New statistics show that women buyers may soon account for half the new-car purchases in America. The potential of that new market has prompted the auto industry to shift gears in that direction.

Stargazing Photographer gives inside look at celebs

By Richard Lech
Staff writer

Where does the character leave off and the actor's real personality begin?

For some stars, that's a tough question to answer, according to Linda Solomon.

Solomon, a Detroit photojournalist who has made stargazing her specialty, has interviewed and photographed celebrities of stage, screen and politics. She shared some of her photos, observations — and gossip — last week with the Livonia Town Hall.

Shooting on the "Dynasty" set, Solomon found Joan Collins to be just like the character she plays on the show — cold and nasty.

"She IS Alexis," Solomon said.

Collins wouldn't talk to anyone on the set and carried herself with an arrogant demeanor, Solomon said.

Larry Hagman has taken on many of the characteristics of his J.R. Ewing character from "Dallas" — right down to speaking with a Texas drawl.

"I don't remember him speaking that way on 'I Dream of Jeannie,'" Solomon said.

At a banquet honoring his mother, actress Mary Martin, Hagman came with a Texas-style saddlebag slung over his shoulder full of what looked like money.

"He handed me a \$100 bill with his face on one side and 'In Hagman we trust' on the other," Solomon recalled. "It said for \$10 you could send away and get an 8-by-10 glossy of him."

"Only J.R. could pull that off."

Tommy Hearn's home in Southfield. One of the boxer's entourage advised her not to walk behind the bar, hearing a scratching noise, she peeked behind the bar — where she saw Hearn's pet cougar.

Solomon's job has taken her to such glamorous locales as the set of "The Tonight Show" and the Academy Awards.

In "The Tonight Show" studio, Solomon found that even after nearly a quarter of a century as the host, Johnny Carson remains tense during the taping of the program and "creates an uptight environment" on the set. She was allowed to photograph him during the show, but was forbidden to snap during his monologue.

By contrast, "Good Morning, America" host David Hartman has a relaxed manner and gives "you the feeling that he's someone you've always known."

Frequent "Tonight Show" guest hostess Joan Rivers has a living making disparaging remarks about her husband, Edgar. But Solomon saw that Edgar sits very close to Rivers on the set and watches over her as she performs.

"Here she makes fun of him, but she really is dependent on him."

To shoot the Academy Awards, photographers must arrive by 9 a.m. to nab a good spot to shoot the stars as they arrive that evening. Complicating matters, the photographers have to work in formal wear since the ceremony's "black-tie" rule also extends to the press.

stars goes the sadness of talking to those whose fame has faded.

At her parents' home in Birmingham, Solomon interviewed singer Tiny Tim, who came wearing a tuxedo and with his hair dyed red. Tiny Tim's fame reached its height in 1969 when his marriage was nationally televised. But by the time Solomon interviewed him, he had been reduced to the status of being a performer in a circus.

"He said, 'I gave Helen Reddy her start in Las Vegas, and now she won't even return my phone calls.'"

Several years ago Solomon met actor Paul Peterson, who was a teen-age heartthrob in the early '60s as part of the cast of "The Donna Reed Show."

"He said young girls now come up to him and say, 'Gee, I used to love you.'"

Which celebrities would Solomon like to interview that she hasn't yet interviewed? She mentioned Robert Redford and Richard Nixon, "which is really a contrast. I'd like to ask what life has been like since the trauma of Watergate."

Solomon said she tries to avoid the negative when she writes about celebrities and would never sell a photo to publications like the National Enquirer.

Detroit may seem like an unusual place for a celebrity photographer to work, but Solomon figures that being one of the few involved in her line of work in this area has helped her succeed.

"It wasn't that I wanted to carve a niche for myself; it's just something I always wanted to do."

ALONG WITH the glamour of meeting reigning

SOLOMON, WHO got her start as a free-lancer at the Birmingham office of the Observer and Eccentric Newspapers, writes the "Clicks" and "Star Tracks" columns for the Detroit News. She used the Mal Ka Theater's screen to show some of her favorites among the celebrity photos she has taken.

Some of the photos have gotten national attention. Her shot of President Reagan and Gerald Ford at the dedication of the Gerald Ford Museum in Grand Rapids now hangs in the White House. Her shot of Mary Cunningham and William Agee — taken before they became the center of a national controversy — appeared in newspapers throughout the country and in Newsweek. A shot of Sammy Davis Jr. studying the lyrics to a song became one of the star's favorites.

Other shots were humorous — George Burns and Dr. Ruth Westheimer clowning around with cigars in hand or boxing promoter Don King and entertainer Pia Zadora vying to see who could have the wildest hair-do.

Solomon said she usually has found "the bigger the star, the nicer the star." This is especially true of "star of stars" Elizabeth Taylor, a gracious, but basically shy, person, Solomon said.

Solomon said her favorite interview was with Barbara Walters, with whom she still corresponds.

MEETING CELEBRITIES can be full of surprise, Solomon said. Actress Stefania Powers and Goldie Hawn, for instance, turned out to be much taller than Solomon expected. (Powers is 5 feet 9, Hawn, 5 feet 8, Solomon said.)

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