

Calling the 'Schotts'

She runs the show for the Reds

By Richard Lech
staff writer

THE FUTURE of Major League baseball in Cincinnati looked bleak in 1984. The Reds, two-time world champions in the 1970s, were mired in last place. The owners were looking to sell. There was a chance that the Reds — professional baseball's oldest franchise — could be moved to another city.

Like other Cincinnati residents, businesswoman Margaret Schott was very concerned. She kept waiting for a local businessman to step forward, buy the team and keep it in the city.

No one did, so she decided to do it herself.

"You know, at Christmas you get a little crazy and you go out and buy things," Schott told the Women's Economic Club of Detroit recently. "I decided, 'What the heck, I'll buy it.'"

Since she bought the team for \$13 million in December 1984, Schott proudly notes that the Reds have added player/manager Pete Rose and a winning attitude that has made them contenders again in the National League's Western Division.

THE REDS owner discussed what it's like to be one of the few woman owners in the man's world of professional baseball at the Women's Economic Club's regular luncheon at the Westin Hotel in downtown Detroit.

Dressed appropriately in bright red, Schott said owning a baseball team was like "going from the real world into Disneyland." Schott has done her best to add a little touch of Disneylike showmanship to the team.

This past opening day, for instance, she hired three parachutists to land at home plate, before the largest opener crowd in the team's history. When the Reds signed Rose in time for his pursuit of Ty Cobb's hit record, Schott had a plane carry the message, "No more woes, we got Rose," across the city.

Saying she doesn't want to shut herself off from the fans in a "glass box," Schott sits in the stands where the fans can see her — and her dog, Schottzie, a lumbering St. Bernard, attends every game with

Schott and gets more fan mail than she does.

Besides her interest in the Reds, Schott owns Buick and Chevrolet automobile dealerships in Cincinnati, and brick, concrete, landfill, leasing and insurance companies.

SHE MORE or less inherited most of the businesses when her husband, Charles, died in 1988. But she had to meet the challenge of continuing to operate the businesses and expanding them.

Before her husband's death, she said, she had been "the happy housewife." She worked on charity and community events and on offbeat projects of her own, such as raising bees, steers and St. Bernards.

His death forced her to take a role in his business empire.

"My first action was to appoint myself chairman of the board, so no one would fire me," she said.

She went around the country to the different plants she owned to let everyone know she was taking over. Her husband had left her the Buick dealership. GM was skeptical about her ability to continue as the dealer, and her managers were plotting "how they could bury Mrs. Schott," she said.

She decided to go on television with her dogs to promote the dealership.

"To this day I think some people think we're selling dog food," she said.

BUT 3½ YEARS after she took over the dealership it became No. 1 in the Tri-State area.

"Finally GM said, 'OK, you can come up and we'll sign you as a dealer,'" I said, "No, you come down."

The managers who plotted to get rid of her are all gone now, she said. Several years ago she added a Chevrolet dealership to her holdings.

She came into the Cincinnati Reds picture as a "concerned citizen, not a woman," she said.

"My first meeting with the other owners was kind of scary. But they met me with a dozen roses."

"They have been very supportive of me. In fact, I might be naive, but I have the feeling I could call any of them and they'd do anything to help me."

HER MOST important goal after buying the team, she said, was to get

Pete Rose, a former Reds player who had been playing with other teams in recent years, back in Cincinnati. Rose became a player/manager for the team, and got his record-setting 4,192nd hit last year to pass Ty Cobb on the all-time list.

She said she also has great admiration for Detroit Tiger manager Sparky Anderson, who managed the Reds during their glory days of the 1970s.

"I think that was one of the dumbest things that Cincinnati ever did when they let Sparky go."


A minor controversy erupted this spring when the Tigers started their home opener slightly before Cincinnati, which, as the Major League's elder statesman, traditionally has the honor of playing the first game.

"If you think you played the first game, you're wrong. On opening day I had them flash on the board, 'Turn your watches back 45 minutes.'"

SCHOTT'S APPEARANCE was arranged by Economic Club member Barbara Rom, an attorney and Bloomfield Hills resident. Rom had seen Schott on the "Today" show and thought she would be the ideal speaker for the club, which has had such speakers as Ronald Reagan, Barbara Walters and Lee Iacocca.

"I was particularly interested in seeing if we could get a woman business representative," Rom said.

Another club member, Pat Simpson of Livonia, has been going to the luncheons for nearly two years. Simpson is a marketing and public relations associate with Coopers & Lybrand in Detroit.

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