

Consumer roots stem from Bible

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(F17C)

By SHIRLEE IDEN

ry complaints went unreported," she said.

If you thought the consumer movement began with the likes of Ralph Nader, Esther Peterson and Betty Furness, think again.

According to Detroit's Director of Consumer Affairs, Esther Shapiro, the fight for consumer protection has roots in the Bible.

Speaking to the members of the Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary of Michigan at their annual membership dinner, Mrs. Shapiro explained detailed her story.

"There are many Biblical references to consumer problems and controls," she said. "In Leviticus, damnation is called down on the who waters the milk, as an example."

"The Sanhedrin was the ancient Jewish body of lawmakers in Jerusalem and they ruled over the people. They had careful licensing of many businesses."

"Each businessperson had to apply for licensing to the Sanhedrin."

Mrs. Shapiro said sellers of cosmetics had to swear they would offer their wares both in the city and the countryside.

"This was because the religious law required that each man come to visit the Temple in the city of Jerusalem several times a year," she said.

"The Sanhedrin wanted to insure that the men's heads wouldn't be turned only when they went to the city. So they made sure the country women had cosmetics as well and would be as attractive as their city sisters."

MRS. SHAPIRO also related that Louis XIV of France decreed against sellers of butter who might put stones in their product to add bulk and weight. King Louis also decreed severe punishment.

"And Martin Luther, who didn't only nail edicts to doors, wrote against people adding foreign additives to food-stuffs," she said.

"Many problems we are concerned about today have long been concerns of society. What's different today is the terrible complexity of our society."

"Today it's difficult just to trace an item back to the parent company."

For example, she said, if you don't like a movie you may find it was made by the Gulf Oil Co.

"And if you have a problem with a cornish game hen, you'll find you have to contact the Greyhound Bus Company which distributes the birds," she said.

"Just pinpointing responsibility becomes an impossible task. And another problem is talking to a computer rather than a human being. An individual just gets lost."

Mrs. Shapiro believes that individuals simply cannot handle consumer problems by themselves and must have expert help.

In a large survey of consumers, those reporting said they considered 23 percent of their purchases unsatisfactory. "Yet two-thirds of their unsatisfac-

"YET PEOPLE aren't apathetic, they just get confused and discouraged. In most complaint departments, a deliberate attempt is made to isolate the complainer and make them feel different."

"The first response after a complaint is voiced is usually 'No one ever said that before.'"

Mrs. Shapiro said Betty Furness, once consumer director for New York City, got a letter from a doctor who told her he purchased a pre-packaged noodle product and found it full of bugs.

"It's relatively easy to control insect infestation in a plant, so we get upset about this," Mrs. Shapiro said.

"That doctor wrote the company and told them his story. They promptly sent him six free packages and each one was also buggy."

"When he complained again, he got back a letter that said: 'We can't understand your complaint. More than 3,000 people a week use our product.'"

Mrs. Shapiro, who was appointed to her present job by Mayor Coleman Young in 1974, said Michigan residents are relatively lucky.

"It's considerably worse in most places. We do have effective, progressive consumer legislation here, but it takes eight to 12 years to get a new consumer law on the books either in Lansing or Washington."

ANOTHER PROBLEM is that consumer laws often are passed without the funds to enforce them or provisions for education.

"In 1966 the 'Truth in Packaging' Law passed in the Congress," she said. "It took two years for the federal government to put out a pamphlet explaining it."

"There are marvelous laws, but you, the consumers, have to enforce them."

Mrs. Shapiro said consumers must lobby for the legislation they believe is required. Today, there is help for them from local, state and federal agencies.

She also suggested that JWVA and other similar organizations should have a chairperson for consumer affairs.

"When I started in this field in 1966, no one had special training," she said. "But I was a practiced lobbyist and an experienced consumer."

"I was like most women, rushing to get out of the kitchen and onto some committee."

Being in the right place at the right time got her the position of consumer specialist for the Michigan Consumer Credit League. She served there for eight years before her mayoral appointment.

A HOME MAKER, wife and grandmother of four, in addition to her professional responsibilities, Mrs. Shapiro said her job is all-consuming.

She has lectured, lobbied and taught and has appeared before legislative and congressional hearings many times.

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Fee for the workshop is \$8. To register, call 645-3230.

Planetarium demonstrations on "Holiday Skies and the Christmas Star" will be given at 2 and 3 p.m., Dec. 26, 27 and 28 in addition to regularly-scheduled shows at 4 p.m. Wednesday, 2, 3, 4 and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays; and 2, 3 and 4 p.m. Sundays.

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