

GALLEN ON THE GO▶▶

The Formative Years

December 25, 2013 had a most special meaning this year. No, my dad didn't surprise me with a model train set in the basement... again! Rather, my wife Ida and I got to spend one hour with PPPC alumnus, Patricia 'Pat' Morris. The only thing that took away from this magical encounter is that it occurred on the 15th Floor of the Palliative Care Unit of the Princess Margaret Hospital. Regaled by stories of growing up in the promotional products industry in the late 70's and early 80's, Pat referred to these times as the "golden years." In those times, you worked hard and you played hard; a work/life balance that seems to be all but gone these days. It was truly these founding members that paved the way for all of us that make a living in this fine industry today. Funny enough, members were often identified by only their first name. People understood who Susan, Leslie, Pat, Brad and Wilson were. In my formative years, I often joked about it, calling this phenomenon, "first name status." Gosh, it was something I could only aspire to! I mean, really, was the name Fred any less recognizable than Moses, Elvis or Cher? Some often joked that I too was on the precipice of acquiring that same exalted status, but I'm deeply aware that only old TV stars, the likes of Stanley Beamish, have that kind of pull!

Listening to Pat that day, I truly paused to reflect on how difficult an environment it was, in those years, for women growing up in a male dominated industry. And there's really no question that Pat was clearly one of the pioneers, regardless of gender. Our paths crossed upon the sad demise of the Riviera Bag Manufacturing Plant, in 1991. That event, in many ways, spawned the birth of DEBCO, Topaz and Ny-Tech Design, the latter owned by the late John Gilbert. And so Pat had a choice to make: Armed with a variety of in-house orders from Riviera, Pat called DEBCO to see if we would be interested in fulfilling them. Included in the package was having her rep the line and us joining what used to be called, the SAAC. In rather short order, Creadis Vancouver, Impact Marketing, Accessories West, Shippam and Associates and Marcom became DEBCO clientele. Immediately thereafter, armed with Pat's teachings, DEBCO joined the SAAC in 1992. Pat's P.M. Promo Show was my first indoctrination into the tradeshow world. I remember it clearly, as a particular encounter still makes me chuckle. A client was fast approaching our table-top display with a nasty scowl on his face. Pat leaned over to me and whispered something about being careful because this guy was a real A-Hole. She was perceptive, and in this case, she was correct. I didn't hesitate and stepped in the man's way with my hand outstretched. I said, "Pat tells me you're an A-Hole; my name's Stan Gallen from Debco, how do you do?" That introduction, unbelievably, formed the basis of my viewpoint that it is always best to be memorable in everything that you do. Always give them a meaningful "leave behind." Pat's decision to call DEBCO that fateful day formally began our ascension toward being an award winning supplier in the promotional products industry, now entering our 31st year and armed with 250 employees!

Pat's tenure with DEBCO, albeit short, was full of teachings. In 1996, DEBCO had its first client appreciation barbecue at our, then, new building on Villarboit Cres. To commemorate the event, we had a tree planting ceremony. I dug the hole and both Pat and I planted a weeping mulberry tree to mark this meaningful day. The tree blooms each year and reminds me of the quieter, almost innocent days of yore. I gave a branch of that tree to Pat on Christmas Day. She asked me if I would frame it, calling it "Patricia's Mulberry" and hang it in the office. That branch now proudly adorns my office wall and I will forever be reminded of Pat's legacy when I look up from my computer screen. Sadly, we live in a world that constantly asks "what have you done for me lately?" In Pat's case, what she did to shape who DEBCO is today, trumps any question about the present. We work in an industry that is approaching its 58th year in existence. Many of our baby boomer brethren are getting older, but their contributions to the industry, in which we all make a living, should never be discounted or dismissed for they are the matriarchs and patriarchs of today's promotional products industry. Thank you, Pat, for your part in DEBCO's rich history. You will never be forgotten.



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