

Industry Pioneers

The free-paper industry has a rich history. And, many people from the Midwest played an important role in its development and growth. The caring, sharing and support members offer each other make this an industry like no other. In this section we will share features from people past and present who helped create the unusual dynamic we enjoy today.

This month our feature story is about Mona Garwood from the Vinton Livewire.

We would like to feature many more pioneers. Do you have someone in mind? If so, please reach out via email to director@mfcg.org with the appropriate contact information. We'll take it from there!



Ink in My Veins

By Mona Garwood, Vinton Livewire

Going back to my beginning right out of college, I can truly say without a doubt, I never would have believed where I would be today. And I must quote the words of the wiser here who said *"sometimes the broken road leads to the best destination"* as I watched my grandiose fashionista plans going up in smoke once I moved back to small town Vinton, Iowa from school in Minneapolis, MN.

So alas, I must admit my beginning as a young fledgling in this business was the result of a friend of a friend knowing my need of a job and giving me a call. This is my 45th year in this business and to look back and see the years and time gone by gives me pause.

In my beginning there were no computers or cell phones.

I was hired at the Vinton Livewire shopper as a salesperson and was put on the street day one with very little training. I never pictured myself as the "outgoing" personality type that doing sales requires, but for some reason, it became a good fit. I had a regular sales beat and walked or drove to see my clients every week.

We hand wrote ad copy and sketched layouts to take back to the layout department. Pictures and artwork were cut out of books to be pasted on layout sheets with rubber cement or glue sticks. Borders were drawn around ads from an inkwell & pen – or fashioned from a border tape roll. Ads were put together like pieces of a puzzle to fill paper layout sheets and once done we hand delivered these pages to the printer to have negatives made into plates for the press. We often had 32-page papers with anywhere from two to eight inserts with multiple breakdowns that were separated into piles and labeled with a top sheet for each carrier or mail route. We had just one somewhat large production room where everything happened that became the mailroom every Wednesday. All papers had to be hand stuffed by our small staff, with the carriers responsible for doing their own. And the mail route papers had to be bundled, bagged, tagged and hand thrown on the dock at the post office.

Other than our manager - we were an all women crew and it was hard work. Deadlines existed then the same as they do today and I still think it is why I always feel the need to go, go, go and have a hard time sitting still for long. I guess I proved myself well enough that they gave me a title and all the responsibility that comes with it. I made lifelong friends, and we loved what we did together.

I joke a lot about having ink in my veins now. Once the passion for print gets in your blood, who you are and what you do is forever changed. In the beginning it was just a job and a paycheck, and maybe would have gone a different direction if I hadn't met my SGI/MFCP family.

And I have one couple in particular to thank for that who turned that page for me at my first conference so many years ago. Sid and Fran Blair of Anamosa, IA, two wonderful, caring, fun people who have never met a stranger and wouldn't let me be one. They took me under their wing that first meeting and I felt I belonged there. My purpose and my love for what I did everyday probably grew 10 times its size once I was enfolded in the love this organization spread throughout its people. And I became involved - and the more I became involved - the more I learned and the more I cared, and knew that what I did everyday was important, and mattered. It became personal and as much a part of my life as my family. It's taken hard work, hard time and sacrifice - and I can't tell you how much reward is in the little things that keep you going.

So, thank you from the bottom of my heart to my original SGI family who brought me into the fold and all the MFCP family I've since met. You have been my rock and my foundation, and I am so glad to have you in my life.

My best advice to everyone is to do what you love, love what you do – and don't be a stranger, be a friend to all you meet.

(And – just to go on record once and for all - I did NOT kill the shrimp).

😊Mona