

BETWEENUS

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A league of her own

Well, hey everyone! Welcome to my first column for Supply House Times! I am delighted these fine folks have asked me to begin writing a regular column for the magazine — and I hope you are just as excited to see me back in print sharing the stories of our industry’s legendary people and companies.

Before I continue, I must extend sincere gratitude to my boss, Mincron President **Wendy Berger**, who has been completely on board since I first approached her about this opportunity. I would not be able to do this without the support of her and everyone at Mincron Software, where I now serve as marketing manager.

It seems only fitting that I am returning to my roots with this column, as Supply House Times gave me my original start in this business. What I thought would be a nice stepping stone

in my career has turned into a 22-year love affair. And that, my friends, is all because of you. Whether I’ve known you for two decades or two months, I’ve learned something from each of you that has stuck with me and made a difference in my career and life. I’m also grateful for the support and opportunity given to me by many of my superiors and colleagues along the way.

It’s also fitting that I now am affiliated with the official publication of the American Supply Association. I spent four years working for that tremendous group, which still holds a dear place in my heart. It was during those ASA years that I began to grasp what this industry is about. While there, I spent significant time on the road personally visiting with distributors, manufacturers and reps, even meeting many of your families. It showed me just how important relationships are in doing business together.



Modern Supply’s **Dottie Ramsey** (shown with Mary Jo Martin at the recent SWA convention), announced she is retiring Jan. 13, 2017.

SALUTING A TRAILBLAZER

As I mulled over how to kick off this first column with a bang, nothing felt quite right. I wanted to lead off with something personal and meaningful, and feature someone who not only is well-known in this industry, but also has been instrumental in my career and life.

That dilemma was solved a few weeks ago, during a surprise presentation by Knoxville, Tenn.-based Modern Supply CEO **Pace Robinson** during the Southern Wholesalers Association’s general session in Palm Coast, Fla. I had tears in my eyes as Pace took the stage to announce after 51 years Modern’s legendary President and COO **Dottie Ramsey** will be retiring effective Jan. 13, 2017. I later learned she picked this date because it is Friday the 13th, and since she was born on Friday the 13th, she felt it was only appropriate.

As Pace described: “Dottie’s enthusiasm is contagious. It doesn’t matter if it’s the guys in our warehouse, the contractors who come in all sweaty or industry captains running multi-billion-dollar conglomerates. She meshes with everyone and treats them with respect as she shares her passion for this industry. And she does it all with a pride and charm that leaves quite an impression on people.”

Robinson closed with a Maya Angelou quote he felt was

“Dottie, you made all of us feel special.”

— *Pace Robinson, Modern Supply*

perfectly appropriate for the effect Dottie has had on so many: “People will forget what you said, and they’ll forget what you did. But people will never forget how you make them feel. Dottie, you’ve made all of us feel special.”

Dottie and I go back about 20 years. I was a rookie in this business and was assigned to cover various conventions and events. My parents raised me to listen and learn, pay my dues and show respect to those who have come before me. So I immersed myself in conversations with many industry stalwarts.

One of the things I quickly realized was there weren’t very many of “me” around — except this extraordinarily talented and respected woman named Dottie Ramsey, who had carved quite a career path and who everyone seemed to know. I was in awe meeting her the first time.

She was beautiful, perfectly put together and added a little extra “oomph” to every room she entered. Everyone knew her and would stop to say hello and catch up. I knew then and there I wanted to be just like her! I observed how she handled herself in business meetings and social events, and then tried to emulate her actions.

She took an interest in me, introduced me to many of her connections and took time at every event to sit down and talk with me over some wine. Over all these years, we’ve continued that tradition. And I still come away from each of our conversations completely inspired.

Dottie’s beautiful and charming exterior package is equally matched by the sassy, tough (but fair) and intelligent way in which she conducts business.

Freshly out of school, Dottie interviewed for a position as billing clerk at Modern Supply (the 2011 Supply House Times Supply House of the Year). The accountant she initially met with encouraged then CEO and President **Mitchell Robinson** to talk with her. As Dottie describes, “He was hesitant because of my age and lack of experience, but I said to him, ‘I can’t learn if you don’t give me a chance.’”

That spark in her impressed him and Robinson continually assigned her to roles that would increase her knowledge of all aspects of Modern’s operations. She proved her grit, accepting all new challenges thrown at her. Over time, she was promoted to COO and president.

“Mitchell was my mentor,” she says. “He saw something in me and really pushed me because he knew I wanted to learn. I was taught by my parents that when you take a job you give it 110%, and if you love what you do, you make a career of it. Nothing was ever below me. In fact, when I was executive vice president, I spent several months working in the warehouse because we were shorthanded and they needed me. I’ve never believed I was better than anyone else or beyond doing any job at Modern.

“Even today, if somebody needs help on the counter or in the warehouse or any department, I’ll jump right in to back them up.”

DOTTIE’S ADVICE

Dottie has been instrumental in Modern Supply’s growth, carefully cultivating relationships among associates, customers and vendors. She also has contributed mightily to the industry, serving on countless association committees and boards, and was the first woman to serve as president of ASA and SWA. Her trailblazing spirit is an example of what can be accomplished with a solid work ethic and determination.

While she has been a ceiling-breaker for women in the industry, she never pushed her gender or took a feminist route during her journey. “I never focused on the fact that I was a woman and never acted like I knew everything,” she says. “That doesn’t work. Instead, I was myself.

“In addition to Mitchell, whose confidence gave me such a solid foundation, I have received tremendous support from Pace (Mitchell’s son) and from my husband, Mayford. He had a 25-year career with the state highway patrol and has been retired for 26 years. Many men wouldn’t have been secure enough to step up and support me as my career blossomed, but he has been with me every step of the way.”

I asked Dottie what has kept her motivated, yet so humble all these years, what she would consider her biggest accomplishments and what advice she would give to those just charting their careers. In typical Dottie fashion, her responses had very little to do with her own achievements. Instead, they centered around the impact she could have on others:

1. “I love people and I love this industry. I have made so many friends, and have developed a network of people that trust each other enough to pick up the phone and share confidential concerns and advice.”

2. “I am always thinking about how to serve customers better. I notice the service I get from businesses and make mental notes of things to implement — and to guard against — at Modern. Ultimately, it comes down to treating people the way you want to be treated, and being upfront, fair and honest in your communications.”

3. “I had such wonderful mentors, so I’ve tried to do the same for those who work for me and some that I encounter in the industry. What I try to tell all of you is you’re special and you already have what it takes inside you to succeed at whatever you choose. You have to believe in yourself and be confident. The most rewarding thing to me has been watching so many of them blossom into bigger roles than they thought they were capable of. That makes me so proud.”

4. “I’ve had a lifetime of memories at Modern Supply and within this industry. It’s time to let the next group step up and make its mark. And while I’m in good health, I want to do some other things I’ve never had much free time for. Don’t worry. I will not be a stranger. I’m still going to be around for anybody who needs to talk. And Pace knows if he needs me to help with any special projects, I’m a phone call away. Am I going to miss all this? Absolutely! But I’m looking forward to the next phase of my life. To all those reading this, my final words of advice — you can do it!”

For the past few years, many of my industry gal pals and I have enjoyed referring to ourselves as the #PrincessesOfPlumbing. From all of us, Dottie, you will forever be the #QueenOfPlumbing and of our hearts! 🍷