

Miniatures Marketplace - April 20001

### SEEING THE OPPORTUNITIES

By Barbara Schuckman

Miniatures By Barb

At the MIAA Trade Show in Orlando I had the opportunity to lead the Retailer Forum. The weather was lovely and the attractions were nearby. This made for a smaller than usual group of attendees. We were able to pull our chairs into a circle and exchange ideas about retailing, promoting miniatures, advertising, displays, selling and much more. Those who missed this interchange of ideas lost an opportunity to improve their businesses and return to their shops stimulated with exciting new ideas and plans.

In our discussion we we came to realize that through the years many changes have taken place in our industry. Some shop owners allowed these changes to be roadblocks while some saw them as opportunities.

The first change is the over abundance of retail shows. The shops who see the opportunity exhibit in these shows and extend their customer base. They hand out business cards and newsletters, establish extensive mailing lists and sell product at these shows. Then came the Craft Chains. Again, those that saw the opportunity broadened the lines of merchandise they carry and added services the chains can not provide. The rise of the discount catalog offers the similar opportunities. The latest opportunity is now provided by the internet. How are you going to meet this challenge?

There are many sources vying for your customers time and money. Retailing in this new world calls for creativity. We are in the age of "CUSTOMER SERVICE". More than ever retailers need to read trade publications and books. These sources provide suggestions and creative new ideas. Attending trade shows and communicating one on one with the designers and producers of the products can give you an edge over your competition. Don't be afraid to ask the creators of miniatures what they can do for your shop that would be special. Be open to reading publications and attending trade shows in other industries. Gift or variety shows may have product that your competition does not have or has not even thought of using in conjunction with miniatures. Visit your miniature shops, museums and displays in other cities. I recently visited a shop with many non miniature industry products that blended well with his inventory of miniatures. He was extremely forthcoming with unique suggestions for his customers. The projects he inspired were exciting, unusual and satisfying for the customer. I also noticed that the windows of the shop were clean, as was the parking lot. The displays were fresh and cheerful. This shop was an inviting place to spend time in and most pleasantly make a purchase.

When you are out shopping tune into the things that please you. Was it the way the merchandise was set up? Was it the way you were treated? Was it the way a salesperson communicated with you? Chances are that if it pleased you, it made you want to spend your time and money there. The same techniques can make your shop a place people want to be.

The next time you see a roadblock in your business remember.....

an opportunity is knocking.

This article is dedicated to my friend Eileen Brownawell. Eileen passed away after a long, courageous fight with cancer. Eileen was the backbone of T & E Brownawell Creations. Eileen and her husband Tom have been creating handcrafted tooled miniature pieces since 1978. Eileen ran the machines that Tom set up, she cleaned the pieces, did the office work and cheerfully filled their customers requests. Tom will now have large shoes to fill. I know he is up to the task.

Eileen was an active member of the American Business Woman Association, an organization which helps young woman attend college. Eileen was twice president of her local chapter. Eileen was an extremely giving and caring person and was very charitable with her work in her community.

Her courage and upbeat attitude was boundless. She was an inspiration to many people at the hospital, in her community and in our industry.

Eileen will be missed by her many friends and coworkers, her husband, Tom, her two children and her grandson and granddaughter. Eileen's cheerful smile and upbeat personality will be a loss to all who had the opportunity to know her.