

A 1992 CELEBRATION

*THROUGH
THE
YEARS*

1952 ■ 1953 ■ 1954 ■ 1955 ■ 1956 ■ 1957 ■ 1958 ■ 1959 ■ 1960 ■ 1961
1962 ■ 1963 ■ 1964 ■ 1965 ■ 1966 ■ 1967 ■ 1968 ■ 1969 ■ 1970 ■ 1971

**From studio motorcycling to industry
recycling, public relations has long been
a major catalyst for Georgia growth**

1972 ■ 1973 ■ 1974 ■ 1975 ■ 1976 ■ 1977 ■ 1978 ■ 1979 ■ 1980 ■ 1981
1982 ■ 1983 ■ 1984 ■ 1985 ■ 1986 ■ 1987 ■ 1988 ■ 1989 ■ 1990 ■ 1991

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Editor's Acknowledgements & Commentary: *Essentially this compilation was a project undertaken by several members of The Phoenix, but my special appreciation goes to Lee Rogers, one of the founders of the Georgia PRSA Chapter who is responsible for writing a firsthand, first-rate version of the early years of the Society's development. Thanks also go to another longtime friend and fellow Phoenix member, Dick Hodges, and to authors of previous versions of historical notes, Pam Heisler and Judy Harmon. Also appreciation goes to Rose Wiseman for her committee leadership for the Fortieth Anniversary and for her role in the production of this document as part of the celebration.*

Compiling a brief history on an organization as vibrant as Georgia PRSA inevitably and regrettably omits much material deserving notice and commendation. I apologize to those who fail to find within these paragraphs accomplishments that should be recorded, and I urge anyone assigned to this task in the future to review all years and sources possible to rectify errors and omissions.

Jutting precariously from the roof of the old Biltmore Hotel on West Peachtree, twin radio antennae erected in 1922 and doggedly surviving into the 1990's serve as a quaint and poignant reminder of the early years of public relations in the state of Georgia.

Before revealing the connection between Georgia public relations and those two relic structures that look more like miniature oil field derricks than modern-day radio station towers, let's set the historic scene to see how the profession of public relations has emerged.

Dating to the Great Depression, industry and business hired publicity men and press agents, most having moved into these roles after stints as newspaper reporters. These publicists essentially wrote the prologue to the profession of public relations.

Few Public Relations Positions

Only a very few Southern companies and organizations during this period actually assigned full-time employment duties resembling the public relations positions of today; in fact, they continued to be called publicity men (just a few were women) and press agents.

Among them were some outstanding practitioners of the publicity art, such as Frank Braden, long-time front man for the old Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus. These stunt men were oriented into creating something that would get a client an article or photograph in the local newspaper or an interview on the local radio station.

The Little Colonel's Blastoff

Hence the symbolism atop the Biltmore Hotel, erected by WSB, first radio station in the South and milieu of the energetic and creative mind of station manager Lambdin Kay. During one of his civic-minded promotions, the inimitable "Little Colonel Kay" had two motorcycle drivers load their vehicles onto the Biltmore elevator and hoist

them to the station's penthouse studio. The idea was to formally kick off Atlanta's United Givers campaign on the airwaves -- by having the cycles rev up with motors and sirens sounding at full blast.

Evidently, the Colonel hadn't shared his dramatic plan with the man in the control booth. When the bikers hit the pedal on his countdown in the confined studio space, the decibels blasted the headsets of the station engineer as well as the transformer for the station -- knocking WSB off the air for hours. Perhaps the lesson here is that getting attention must have boundaries.

As a rule, publicists recognized the need for control in their work. They received able help along the way from other dedicated men and women who understood that standards of good character and integrity would be necessary if this field of endeavor wanted to succeed; otherwise, skills in applying journalistic and promotional talents would be discredited.

Utilities in Georgia helped established this credibility; Georgia Power Company, Southern Bell and Atlanta Gas Light Company both had public information designees prior to World War II. They answered news queries when there was a streetcar accident, a labor strike or an interruption of service. Admittedly, in seeking to minimize negative publicity, explosions and other mishaps weren't given the same forthright crisis management expected today.

Coca-Cola has its press representatives, but they seldom contacted the media. Most organizations had no specific person to talk with reporters; frequently, this fell directly on the shoulders of the president, if he was inclined to comment.

Agency Sets Up Public Relations

Liller Neal Battle, an advertising agency, early saw the need for a public relations arm and established a department for this function before World War II, recruiting a news

reporter. Another Atlanta ad agency soon followed suit. One labor union, CIO, had an Atlanta PR man, also recruited from the local newspaper.

Government, too, saw the value of better communication with its public. Called "press secretaries" in the World War I, those engaged for governmental duty became known in the Roosevelt New Deal of the 1930's as "public information officers" within the burgeoning American bureaucracy, and the title "information officer" extended into the military in World War II.

Particularly during the years of World War II, military and government agencies helped forward the cause of public relations as a career path, and many of those gaining experience in government moved into industry and business.

The postwar years saw relatively fast structure in the private sector; by 1951, Coca-Cola, Atlanta Gas Light, Delta Airlines, Eastern Airlines had expended their public relations activity. On the education front, Emory University was a leader and in state government the Georgia Department of Public Health was noteworthy in its communication program.

Those without their own public relations capacity could turn to the ad agencies with public relations departments or to such men as Felton Gordon, who had opened his own independent public relations firm and was offering services to organizations.

Landmark Downtown Luncheon

In the early fall of 1951, three Atlanta public relations men met for a downtown lunch at the then popular Ship Ahoy Restaurant on Luckie Street: Gordon, Jim Cobb, public relations director for Delta Air Lines, and Lee Rogers, public relations manager for Lockheed Georgia Division. The expressed purpose was to discuss what could be done to give more stature to their chosen career, and how to remove the stigma that public

relations was, according to many, "just a fancy name for press agent."

These men were aware that the national Public Relations Society of America had been formed in the Northeast in 1948 with the merge of the National Accredited Publicity Directors and the American Council of Public Relations. They saw this organization as a suitable match to their own thinking about how public relations needed to be pursued in Atlanta.

Before they arranged their eventful luncheon, Felton Gordon had taken it upon himself to look thoroughly into the emerging national organization. Cobb and Rogers had made contact with some of the pioneer PRSA members in the East and Midwest and perused publications that were beginning to discuss the impact of public relations and those involved in it.

Chapter Idea Attracts Interest

Lunch ended in an agreement that attendance at the upcoming Chicago meeting of PRSA in November, 1951, would be a goal. As it turned out, Cobb, Gordon and Dr. Allen Albert of Lockheed attended -- and came back home enthusiastic about founding a chapter in Atlanta, as the first Southern chapter in the national society.

Other Atlanta public relations persons were contacted and responded favorably. Proposed bylaws were drawn in a way not to conflict with the national organization. This meant adhering to strict PRSA eligibility requirements, and thus the task of obtaining at least 12 qualified charter members began in earnest. The effort took months, but proved successful and when the charter was petitioned, Atlanta was accepted.

Ed Lipscomb, PRSA national president and public relations director of the National Cotton Industry Council of America in Memphis, presented the charter and inducted members at a dinner meeting May 1, 1952, at Capital City Club in downtown Atlanta.

Atlanta had won the race to become the first chartered PRSA chapter in the South by a matter of just days!

Charter members besides Cobb, Gordon and Rogers: Dr. Allen Albert, who served as 1952-53 president; Bradford Ansley of Emory University; Clifford Fligg, American Red Cross; Mitchell Goldwire, Ga. Dept. of Public Health; J. C. Haynes, Sears Roebuck and Co.; Lambdin Kay, WSB; Charles Rawson, Charles Rawson Associates; Phillip Rosell, General Motors, and Troy Stone, Fulton Bag & Cotton Mills.

Also joining during the charter year were: Edgar Forio and Ovid Davis, both of Coca-Cola Co.; Ed Fain, Colonial Stores; Frank Malone, Southern Bell; Al Richardson, Life of Georgia; Julian Trivers, Davison's (now Macy's), and Harry Becker, General Electric.

Agenda: Promote Public Relations

The agenda for the new chapter's formative years was straightforward: to sell and explain public relations; to emphasize quality of performance and ethics, and to recruit new, qualified members to spread the reputation of a profession still in its infancy. Speaking engagements were solicited to provide members a forum to explain public relations and how it could benefit and help guide an organization.

PRSA's first decade in the South saw tremendous expansion as did the profession itself. Supplanting publicity stunts were planned events which created newsworthiness. Television was creating an outlet requiring a completely different communication approach. And even the words "communication" and "communications" began to seek better definition. (The first now commonly relates to the public relations umbrella while the latter refers to the technical applied fields, i.e. telephone, telegraph, etc.)

As public relations personnel became more sophisticated in their approach through

education and experience, the host of publics served began to include social, community and political concerns and benefits that demanded more complex communication programming.

One local example of this elevation of importance of public relations: when Lockheed reopened the giant World War II Bell Bomber Plant at the outbreak of the Korean War, the firm lured Dr. Allen Albert, a sociology professor at Emory University, to head its community and political relations. Lockheed recognized the magnitude of considerations when a small community would be faced with an input of 10,000 aircraft workers needing homes, sewers, water, schools, transportation and roads. Dr. Albert's enterprise was indicative of the spreading concerns of the public relations practitioner and of corporations.

Employee communications was becoming vital and some early PRSA members set up their own companies specializing in producing company employee newspapers or magazines for a client company -- devising, writing and handling distribution of other communication and incentive promotions for the client. Financial public relations practitioners emerged, taking over writing and production of quarterly and annual reports.

Capitalizing on a Special Event

Coca-Cola gained national and international news attention in 1954 for its 50th anniversary events and plant tours, all of which were orchestrated by the corporate public relations staff and others engaged for this purpose. This was an early example of how capitalizing on a local news event could have far-reaching implications, and the story was unfolded when the Georgia PRSA Chapter invited Coca-Cola personnel to detail how the event was accomplished and promoted.

The American Women in Radio and Television, during its 1953 Atlanta convention,

toured the airplane production line at Lockheed, which turned the visit into a media event to help the U.S. Air Force. Concerned about awareness, the Air Force needed to get its air raid warning message to civilians; Lockheed became one of the first Georgia companies to use the electronic media broadly by demonstrating for these 500 women communicators filmed workings of the warning system and providing copies for each of them. Similar audio tapes were provided for radio attendees.

During the 1960's, public relations moved still more frequently into managerial positions within companies, within trade and professional associations and within state, local and federal government and educational facilities. Women became a growing factor in public relations. Marjorie Leibman and Deezy Scott, partners in their own public relations and advertising agency, were the first two female members of the Atlanta chapter of PRSA.

The decade of the Sixties also saw the birth of PRSA accreditation, a major step toward true professionalism. The program established in 1964 was voluntary, but almost immediately became a goal of many members who wanted to be among those entitled to use the APR designation.

Student Society is Formed

Those studying public relations in college were also getting more assistance from practicing professionals. In 1968, the national assembly formed the Public Relations Student Society of America and the Atlanta chapter hastened to sponsor a PRSSA chapter at the University of Georgia in 1969, named the John Drewry Chapter honoring retirement of the professor emeritus at the Henry W. Grady School of Journalism.

This was also the same year that the Atlanta chapter inaugurated a monthly newsletter and appointed Phil Harrison as editor, who produced it under the name of

Intercom. Publication of the Intercom under a succession of PRSA member editors over the years has helped assure communication within an ever-growing organization. Another contributing factor in the 1960's was an ongoing membership campaign, beginning in 1965 when the board established for the first time a membership goal and invitational drive. Previously, it had been left up to the individual to seek out a sponsoring member if he or she wished to join. By implementing a phone and mail campaign, PRSA began inviting prospective members to attend meetings as guests. That year, membership topped 100 for the first time.

Chapter Renamed in 1966

In 1966, the Atlanta Chapter was renamed the Georgia Chapter, reflecting its statewide interest and members in other Georgia locations. In the same year Public Relations Week was observed with a tribute to Ivy Lee, widely recognized as "father of public relations." In attendance at a special ceremony in Cedartown, where Mr. Lee grew up, was the honoree's son Ivy Lee Jr. The historical plaque presented is now embodied in a memorial that stands on the Cedartown Courthouse grounds.

When PRSA came to Atlanta for its national conference in 1968 at the Hyatt Regency, the Georgia chapter had a major hand in the planning and direction of events.

By the early 1970's, another advance for the chapter helped the communication and exchange methods when more formal and broader structure for PRSA activities were enacted, advancing from the officers and a few board members not only making all the decisions but chairing and carrying out most projects themselves. Separate committee chairmen with more active committee members were given responsibility in an expanding agenda of activity.

Education Comes to Forefront

Besides growing interest in monthly chapter luncheons with its program speakers and presentations designed as informational sources for attending professionals, the Georgia chapter also began during this decade to schedule separate educational sessions. Workshops over breakfast were inaugurated, and later added through the years have been a host of other formats and topics attuned to the needs and requests of members.

Georgia's PRSA accomplishments gained national attention frequently. The state organization won its first chapter banner award in 1973 for the most outstanding over-100-member chapter and repeated the feat in 1976. Honorable mention was given in 1979. On the individual member level, Georgia member Richard E. Hodges received the Paul M. Lund Public Service Award. The Silver Gavel Award was presented to the Georgia Chapter in 1980 for contributing the most to the promotion and understanding of the public relations profession as a result of an extensive "PR for PR" campaign undertaken in 1979.

International Committee Formed

During the decade of the 80's, the chapter reflected the worldly aspects of communication by establishing a committee and activities for those members with international interests, calling on the expertise of such leaders as Everett Hayes and others to guide this burgeoning aspect of public relations.

By 1981, the fourth student society was in place at Clark College, joining those already at the University of Georgia, Georgia State University and Georgia Southern University. In 1982, Georgia PRSA presented a \$1,000 scholarship to a PRSSA student member; this was the first of a year-to-year series, as the chapter continued its strong support for public relations education.

The decade of the 80's also saw the chapter

take an unusual step to honor and bring together members with long-standing reputations as leaders in the public relations field. The Phoenix was formed in 1986, tapping eight charter members: Ric Willix, Anne Poland Berg, Al Richardson, George Goodwin, Harry Malone, Dick Hodges, Lee Rogers and Paul Karelson. One or more members have been inducted each year since that time.

In 1983, the chapter reached its goal of 300 members to qualify four delegates to the PRSA National Assembly. By this time, the growth of membership demanded more chapter administrative work than volunteers could handle alone, and member Denise Grant was appointed to a staff position that eventually became known as executive director.

Practitioners Among Civic Leadership

Although Atlanta had long been recognized as the "Gateway to the South" and given Georgia PRSA an excellent base for its professional stance, after the curtain rang up on the 1990's the spotlight on the city and state intensified because of its success in landing major sports events: two consecutive World Series, the Super Bowl, and most significant of all -- hosting the international 1996 Summer Olympics. Communication needs in Georgia generated by events of this magnitude promise a continued bright future for the profession of public relations.

Aside from awards and recognition within the ranks of the state and national organization, a history of Georgia PRSA would be incomplete without noting the thousands of service hours contributed to the community by PRSA members year after year.

The impact of this involvement is monumental. For example, Atlanta's emergence as the principal city of the South could be pegged to the Forward Atlanta campaign of the Chamber of Commerce in the 60's, and public relations professionals were in the

corps launching this magnificent effort. In fact, on the rolls of volunteers and leaders for virtually every benevolent and civic organization are names of public relations practitioners. May this selfless involvement to help others continue to be a hallmark of Georgia public relations.