



Membership Has its Rewards: The Forum Group

Over the last ten years, the specialty retailers in The Forum Group, including Mitchells, Mario's, Stanley Korshak, Andrisen Morton and nine others have been the ones to watch. Every one of them is on Esquire's "Best of Class" list of the top 35 stores in America. Each of them has expanded or opened new stores, and all have experienced significant growth. Most have added women's to their mix and several have added fine jewelry.

It's no coincidence that the Forum members are considered by many to be the smartest merchants out there. They've had great mentors... each other. They share every aspect of their business with their savvy peers, and without limits. At their semi-annual meetings, they visit each other's stores, make recommendations, and then make sure that members follow the advice they've been given. The result has been a willingness to take risks that have just about always paid off.

But that's not all. The real test of an alliance is how it performs in times of crisis. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, many members of the group flew to New Orleans, at their own expense, and contributed in many ways to support the Rubensteins, who were able to reopen in an amazing 51 days after the storm. It's just one example of the cohesiveness that is the hallmark of the group, and one of many reasons why they are arguably the strongest coalition in retailing.

Best Place to Get Misty Over Something Other Than Business: Fathers Day Luncheon

Kudos to Rich Wurtzburger and the rest of the committee for getting together more celebrities in a single room, (and better goodie bags) than any event in our business. Now in its 67th year, the Father's Day Council was designed to promote Father's Day, to build retail business in the month of June (remember when Father's Day was a month-long affair?), and to honor fathers in general. In addition to the New York edition, there are successful Father's Day luncheons in 20 cities around the country, all designating a significant amount of the money they raise to support local and national charities.

Wurtzburger has been chairman for the past four years; last year's event was the most successful ever with honorees including superstar wrestler Hulk Hogan, Senator John Edwards, NBA Star Dwayne Wade, and our industry's own Allen Sirkin.

How to get high-profile honorees? Although he admits it gets harder every year with celebrities increasingly reluctant to reveal their personal lives, the trick, says Wurtzburger, is to confirm one top celeb early on and to send out an impressive video with clips from past events.

This year, Macy's Ron Klein will be our industry's Father of the Year; the committee has also been talking to Barack Obama, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Billy Crystal. But more than its star power, the luncheon reminds us all that our most important role model is often the guy we forget to thank for all the sacrifices, the words of wisdom, the simple hugs. Says Wurtzburger (father of 7-year-old Ryan and 5-year-old Gavin), "When I'm at the podium and I know my dad's sitting upfront, I try to look past him so I don't get too choked up..."



1. Honorees Hulk Hogan and Tom Glavine; 2. Glen Schanen, Macy's; Honoree Senator John Edwards; 3. Honoree Dwayne Wade with PEI's Paul Rosengard and son Joey; 4. Rich and Jennifer Wurtzburger, Ryan and Gavin.