



RETIREES RETURN:

RETIREES HONOR
PAST BREAKTHROUGHS AND
THE CURRENT BREAKTHRU AT TWICE-YEARLY GATHERINGS



Twice a year in March and September, three dozen or more beverage industry retirees meet for a special breakfast or lunch to reconnect, share old "war stories," and find out the latest goings-on in the business they dedicated most of their adult professional lives to. The group is comprised almost exclusively of retirees from Breakthru Beverage Group LLC ... or rather Charmer Sunbelt, which merged with Wirtz Beverage Group in 2015 to create Breakthru Beverage Group.



Paul McDaniel, retiree group administrator; and Bill Morawski, retiree group facilitator; are at the helm of the group and ensure the connectedness among the members.



Retirees Carmen Meo and Mel Mazer are pictured here with Breakthru Beverage East Region President Kevin Dunn and former President Joe Davolio, who remains on the company's Board of Directors.

William "Bill" Morawski, a 30-year company veteran, heads the group and puts together the various gatherings. He recalled, "Bob Bireley was the salesman who started this in 1996. He ran this twice a year as a biannual breakfast event from 1996 through 2011. In 2011, his health was failing, and Bob asked me to take the reins. I reluctantly did, but I'm glad I did and I've been doing it ever since. Bob passed away in 2012."

Morawski continued, "The people who come are retirees. I think we have about 90 active people on the roll. Traditionally, we get somewhere between 35 and 40 who show up for each event as some of those 90 are out of state now. I think we had 38 at our last luncheon. So, that was a pretty decent turnout. We have a friends list as well, and they are some suppliers that we have dealt with over the years who have been close to a lot of the salespeople and office people. So, they're on our list as friends, and they're invited also. There might be two or three out of that who show up."

"In the early years, we had it all over the place," Paul McDaniel, a former sales representative who retired in 2006, recalled. "Wherever we could find a place that would take us! The Holiday Inn in Timonium was a big one. They'd cater for us. Eventually, we started doing more luncheons."

So what are the highlights of attending? It's pretty uniform for each industry pro. Laurence "Larry" Zabriske, former Vice Pres-

ident of Spirits, stated, "The highlight of these luncheons has remained constant over the years, and that is getting to see the other retirees and find out how they are doing. The company was known for the longevity of service by many of its employees. So, in many cases we spent 20, 25, or 30 years working for and with each other. This length of time created strong bonds and friendships that have lasted beyond our employment."

McDaniel agreed, adding, "The highlight

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is seeing all of the salesmen that I haven't seen in six months and learning about what the company is doing now as opposed to what it used to do. It's nice to hear what's going on. And most of us think, 'Oh, I'm SO glad I'm not there now!' As you would imagine, a lot of us are technologically challenged. So, we'd have a problem. But I guess they'd teach us and we would learn."

Morawski often refers to McDaniel as the retiree group's "acting secretary." But McDaniel bristles at the suggestion. "I don't have a title," he insisted. "I just help out as best I can, keeping a spreadsheet on all of the retirees, their addresses, their phone numbers, their spouses' names. We pass them out at each meeting so everybody knows how to get in touch with everybody. But it's Bill who does most of the hard work."

It helps that one of the group's main members is still active at Breakthru Beverage Group. Former President Joe Davolio remains on the company's board of directors. "So, I'm asked by Bill Morawski to give some comments about what's going on now," he said, "like with our negotiations regarding possibly merging with RNDK and where that stands. It is a privilege for me to do that and to field questions from the folks."

The retirees' most recent get-together



Here are Dave Berzellini, J.J. Parker, Rick Hackett, and Frank Frick.



You can't have a successful salesforce without a successful administrative team. Pictured here with retired salesperson Susan Wellman are retired administrators Pat Alderton, Gladys Schostag, Joann Johnson, Millie Bessling, Shirley Schlicht, Pat Bredon, Sherry Smith, Marie German, Laverna Mallory and Doretha Sykes.

was at company headquarters. A luncheon took place on Sept. 12 that indeed drew 38 members of the group. Most agreed, it was one of the best gatherings yet. Zabriske recalled, "The event on Sept. 12 went extremely well. In addition to a core of retirees that are regulars at these events, a number of others who reside outside the Baltimore metro area were in attendance, which added to the fun and excitement of the day. The key takeaway for me, and a very obvious one, is that time doesn't stand still, and we should take advantage of these get-togethers and enjoy each other while the circumstances of our lives permit."

Davolio added, "I think it was great to have it at the company and everyone seeing what they were a part of building over the years, what the company has become now. Its size and scope. It gives all of us a good feeling. I've suggested offering a formal tour at a future get-together. No more than may-

be a half-hour, because some of us old-timers can't walk around a warehouse that big!"

A larger-size warehouse is, of course, not the only big change the business has undergone since many of these folks retired. Perhaps the biggest difference in the industry today is the consolidation of business, first at the supplier level, which has in turn led to a consolidation of business at the wholesaler level. "Thirty five or forty years ago," Zabriske pointed out, "suppliers looked at their business in the U.S. on a state-by-state basis. One supplier might have different brands in three or four wholesalers within a state. Today, it's looked at nationally. As a result of this change, sup-

pliers are looking for a wholesale company who can drive their strategic vision and represent their lines from coast to coast and not state by state. Ideally, they would like to deal with one cost-effective company that can guarantee identical and effective implementation of their programs in every market."

Davolio shares this assessment. He went one step further in reporting, "The business has shifted away from personal relationships and more towards performance contracts. It's still important to build trust between suppliers and distributors, and distributors and our customers. But the performance contract rules everything now. That's a big change."

With so many things different, it's good to maintain some sense of history and connectivity. And the twice-yearly get-togethers for company retirees fits that bill. Zabriske stated, "The group sort of represents a collective memory. We each remember different things, which when taken together provide a rich history of the lives we spent together."

Morawski wistfully concluded, "Maybe we worked for one another sometimes. But we all became friends. And now I think everyone just enjoys getting together, seeing how each other's health is, and what everyone is doing in their spare time." ■

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Here are retirees Bill Atkins, Rob Schoenfelder (not retired, is currently Breakthru's United On-Premise Division Manager), Bill Morawski, Carmen Meo and Terry Boegner.

