



TAS *Tales*

**Fun stories
shared from the
Tas industry**

Composed by
TAS Marketing with
stories and photos
by TAS members

Volume 1 • Number 1

Why We Are Never “Just” the Answering Service

By Mari M. Osmon

We have all been blessed to be part of a business that truly touches many people’s lives on a daily basis. No, we never get our photos in the paper or a simple “Thank You” for a job well done. But yes, we are the real silent heroes to many. Quietly we go about our work and make sure that others are taken care of. Here is a sample of what can happen in an Answering Service on an ordinary day...

A Grandmother places an order for her first grandbaby for that very special toy that will become a family treasure for years to come.

A home owner did not lose all of his possessions because we paged the plumber to fix the leak in his pipes.

A woman, who is terrified on a dark and lonely road, talks to us and knows that help is on the way.

We answer a silent intruder alarm and a precious life is saved.

A transplant team is assembled at 3 am for the long awaited kidney transplant for a six-year old girl.

A woman who has lost all desire to live is cross-connected to a trained professional who gives her hope for tomorrow.

A minister is called to the bed of a man, so he will not die alone.

Yes, we do make a difference every hour of every day. That is why it is so important never to accept the phrase “just the answering service”. Instead, with pride, tell that person about the very special place called an Answering Service.

Flying Cedric

At the ATMS Expo in Atlanta where our keynote speaker was Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, I asked Cedric Adams if we could take him out to dinner. As I was speeding down the interstate, Cedric pointed his hand to the left and said we had missed the turn. I said “Hang On” and took a quick left, across two lanes of traffic and made the turnoff. Although we left the ground and caught some air, we made the turn. Cedric mentioned that he has an aircraft but has never left the ground in such a hurry!.



Cedric Adams

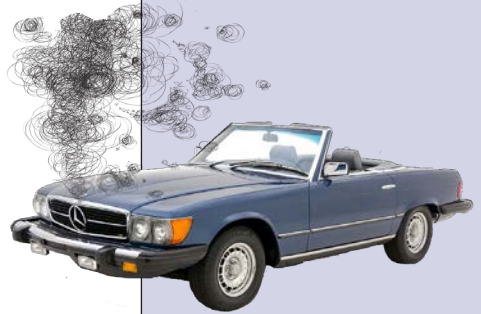
The Somewhat Impressive Mercedes

While attending our trade show in San Francisco, I wanted to show off my new (used) Mercedes 450SL. We had a lovely dinner with San Francisco as our backdrop.



Betty Porter

Betty Porter, Chris and myself waited for the valet to bring out my shiny new car. Sitting high on the hog, I started down the hill from Coit Tower only to smell – then see smoke billowing out from under the hood. Since Betty and I are longtime friends – all we could do was laugh. Mr. Ego didn’t look so smug having to take a cab home.



Flying Screaming Monkey

To save money, ATSI was charged with one large hall split in two, with vendors on one side and chairs set up for the attendees conferences on the other side. During one of the speeches, I got bored and thought I’d liven it up by throwing the “Flying Screaming Monkey” which has a loud scream as it flies through the air. Bernie Torvik and Joe Everly were on the receiving end of this flying, screaming distraction. As Joe caught the monkey, the entire audience looked at him as if he were the culprit.



Joe Everly and Bernie Torvik



After things calmed down, Joe threw it back at me with all the holy screaming going on. The show had to be stopped while they rolled the paneling back in place. I heard afterwards that the presentation was not that good so the screaming monkey was a welcome relief.

**Your
answering
service is as
good as
your worst
operator.**

TAS TALES stories are presented in random order. They are not intended to represent preference or chronological significance.

Our First National Convention

A long, long time ago (during the Switchboard era in the early 70's), a couple of young kids (in their very early 20's) had the opportunity to buy a Telephone Answering Service. Shortly thereafter, at the suggestion of their main competitor (and soon to be friend and mentor), they joined ATAE (Associated Telephone Answering Exchanges). This was ATSI's predecessor.

Who is this stranger and why would he, our "Main Competitor", give us advise on how to succeed in this strange new industry we were about to embark on? Never-the-less we did take his advice and join, not only our national association (ATAE), but also our State & Regional association(s). We were welcomed at various association meetings and met many friends (past & current).

Other than a brief stint in the army – my wife and I never traveled out of our state. Now that we belonged to our national association, the opportunity to travel out-of-state to a national convention was an opportunity of a lifetime at this stage in our lives. This would be the first of many association conventions/vacations for us. Actually, the conventions were our only vacations for many years. Our first experience traveling (flying no less) was to the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. I think it was either 1974 or 75. Seasoned travelers that we were not, we took our 1st flight to Colorado (actually our first flight anywhere) with a layover and change of planes in Chicago O'Hare. Oh, this was way cool. Since we had well over an hour before our departure, we found a bar near the tarmac where we could watch the planes arrive and depart.

After a cocktail we went to our departure gate to leave and strangely enough it looked unusually vacant. I inquired about our scheduled flight to Colorado and was informed it left almost an hour ago. What? How can that be, how could we have missed it. Looking at my watch it indicated we had plenty of time before our scheduled departure. The airline person I was speaking to said "did you know there's a time change from your state of departure to here in Illinois"? DUH - no - double DUH. Neophytes that we were, it never occurred to us there was an hour difference between home and here. We finally realized we watched our plane and luggage depart as we were celebrating with a cocktail in the airport lounge.



After much delay, we were able to secure a later flight to Colorado Springs. We arrived in the nick of time for the opening reception, however, we had no luggage and no change of clothes. What we had on for traveling was not quite appropriate for our first foray into this convention world. We decided to just order room

service that night. Our luggage finally did arrive and we attended the subsequent convention meetings - on time I might add. A valuable traveling lesson was learned on our first convention trip!

Herb & Jan Chinowski

**I hate it when
people act all
intellectual
and talk
about Mozart
while they've
never even
seen one of
his paintings...**



CANDID SHOTS



Caught you – looking for something?



Anxious attendees waiting to see all the new technology from the TAS Vendors.



"I wondered why those cats were only following me" - Allan Fromm (person with crustacean on head) & Tom Lindsay



We can have some fun!



Here Steve Michaels slips behind a 557B cardboard. The difference between the 557A and 557B is that the phone dialing pad is at the top versus the bottom



*MINE, MINE
Some people
(Earl Kuntz) take
it serious when
there is alcohol
involved.*

Dem Bad Bugs

During trade shows while all the attendees are at conferences, the vendor hall gets pretty lonely. The booth right behind ours was Frank D'Ascenzo (Mr. Frankie to us) from Axon Communications. The night before, a bunch of us went to a fancy creole restaurant. One of my favorite dishes are crawdads, (mudbugs or crawfish). Thinking ahead, I took a dead crawdad back to my hotel room and slipped it inside Axon



Communications demo equipment first thing the following morning.

When the hall opened the next day, I kept my eyes on Axon's booth. Sure enough, a gentleman walked up to the Axon Communications booth to see the equipment. Just as Mr. Frankie was starting his demo, I poked my head through the curtains toward his booth and told the potential buyer that Axon equipment is loaded with bugs. As Mr. Frankie's mouth dropped open, I lifted the lid on his equipment and said, "There it is!"

After flying back and forth over the tops of our booths, the condition of that poor crawdad had only one claw and no face. Convention attendees would be set aback as this flying crustation came over the top for one last time.

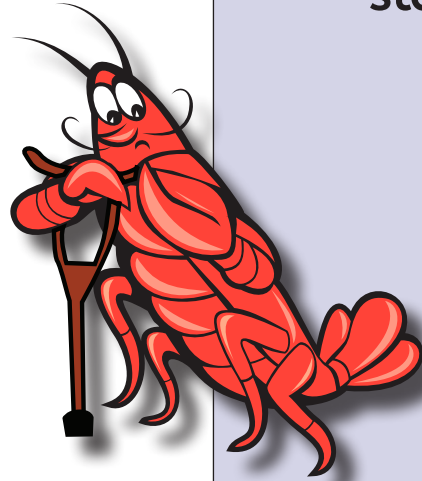
Lookout Below

At the beautiful Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, the vendors were filing out of their rooms preparing for the opening of the trade show. The Regency has a huge atrium in the middle, completely open. As we followed Patty & Roy Emmett to the elevators, I spotted the maids cart and for some unknown reason, grabbed a roll of toilet paper and just tossed it over the side into the open atrium.

At the same moment, Roy looked back to see what I was doing and then looked over the edge to see the damage. The roll of toilet paper barely missed a guy's head. But just as he looked up to see where the roll came from, Roy stuck his head over the railing into the atrium to see where I had tossed it. Unfortunately the victim saw Roy and yells out "There he is"! After seeing the look of horror and shock in Roy's eyes, I almost peed my pants. Roy was now the Unibomber of Toilet Paper. Roy looked at me and just shook his head. I said we better slide out the back. Thank God the almost hit toilet paper guy was not a member of the TAS industry so running into him again was very slim. Dinner was on me that night.

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."

Mark Twain



A Heartbeat Away

During my 42 years in the tele-communications business, medical achievements have been breath taking. Young men and women entering our career field have no idea what they will witness in the next few years. What some of us have witnessed has been mind-boggling and I wish to share a little story with you.

One afternoon, many years ago, visitors came to our office to rent a pager for a relative who would need to be contacted when a heart suitable for transplant would become available. We presented the pager to them and said there would be no charge.

Months went by. We heard nothing. We wondered what happened to the transplant candidate. Did he get a heart? Did he survive? We didn't know. Transplants were rare and hospitals in Maryland were not performing them. We felt proud that a pager from our office was having something to do with a person receiving a heart. But what was happening?

In the meantime, we bought a little cottage, renovated it, bought our STARTEL and moved into the world of computer technology. But we still wondered what happened to our transplant guy?

Then, one day I was coming into the office and met a man walking with a little girl across our parking lot. My gut told me who he was. Could it really be our transplant patient coming to return the pager? Could it really be a healthy man with a healthy beating heart?

I immediately said "May I help you?" (hoping he would give me good news). His reply was "I am sorry it took so long to return your pager. I needed it because the first transplant failed. The second is good." To this point I had not even known his name.

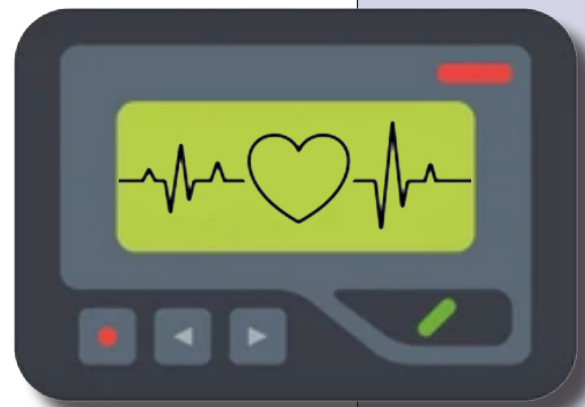
I welcomed him to our answering service and invited him to come in and meet everyone. Everyone welcomed him and just before he left he said, "Thanks. This pager helped me get a good heart and now I am able to play with my grand daughter."

There wasn't a dry eye in the place. And I replied, "Keep the pager and remember us."

Pat Scott

**"You don't
luck into
integrity, you
work at it"**

Betty White
"Good Housekeeping"



A Little Fear Never Hurts

When we owned an answering service in Palo Alto, California, we were on a busy street that just happened to be the epicenter of the neighborhood skateboarders. If you have ever watched, there is a lot of noise with the slamming of the boards as the kids tried to outdo each other with speed, height and the overall danger factor.

We installed signs letting the kids know that it was illegal in the city and dangerous as flying around a corner could cause one hell-of-a-crash. The next day, we would find our signs ripped out once again. I should have put up this one:



**"he best time
to plant a tree
was 20 years
ago. The
second best
time is now."**

Chinese Proverb

With the Shake of a Lamb's Tail

I have been in the industry for over 43 years and in that time have travelled to every state in the union including Hawaii & Alaska selling various products such as the DC-7, AVI training program, ACI remote printers, brokering over 500 answering services & of course started the Connections Magazine.

One story has to be told that is unlike any other. Joanne Milton ran her service out of her home up north of Portland in Maine. I was getting ready for the demo when she came hobbling in from the backyard with a pregnant sheep under her arms stating that "one of her lambs was in trouble". So clearing the equipment out of the way, Joanne brought the birthing sheep into the kitchen and between us rolled up our sleeves to help the mama who by this time was in a lot of discomfort.



Now I don't know if Joanne knew this but on my llama ranch in Montana, I had to go in and turn a baby llama so it would not suffocate. I guess that half-assed qualifies me as a vet, for the day anyway. Joanne knew what to do once the baby had cleared the birth canal and was sucking on Mom's teats getting that much needed colostrum in the first 24 hours of life. I made the sale but it was nothing compared to bringing life into the world... at an answering service.

Up Against the Wall

Most of the TAS industry is composed of honest, decent people... But then there is always one who slips by.....



Kids Again

One of the best cities to eat great food is New Orleans. It was the last day of the convention so we teamed up for dinner that night. The French Quarter is full of 5 star restaurants but for some reason... we just wanted something simple, local and delicious. Bill Robertshaw and I wanted to taste the real flavor that the locals experienced. So we checked with the concierge asking for his recommendations for a greasy spoon that exhibited the way the locals ate. He sent us over the river to Metairie to a little back water dive known only to a few but it was just good Cajun style food. It ended up with, Steve & Chris Michaels, Stuart Lewis, Sharon Grossman & Bill Robertshaw. Since we all could not fit into a cab, we decided to hop into a waiting Limo, headed over the mighty Mississippi and pulled into local crawfish dive in a big, black, shiny limo.

People in the shack were stretching their necks to see what movie star had just pulled up. It was just some crazy TAS people who wanted to get down and dirty and Cajun. We told our waitress that we would like to experience all that was local which included the usual fare of crawdads, sausage, corn, shrimp and a Great Big Mess.

We were seated at a long picnic table that was soon covered with newspaper. Pretty soon they came out with buckets of hot food and just dumped it on the table. No utensils but lots & lots of paper towels. Some of the lady folk were not familiar with how to eat a crawdad so Bill & I started cracking the mudbugs to get the meat out of the tail & then the best part – Sucka da heads which means that you take the head part of the critter and suck out the delicious brains or whatever was up there – it was goood.

We were rather proud of the mess that we created and had a blast with flying legs and claws. We were having so much fun that Sharon recommended that we go to the Café Du Monde, an outdoor cafe which served beignets smothered in powdered sugar. It seemed that the ruckus was still out of hand as the owner started to come our way so I told the limo driver to pull up close and get ready to run.

In a city where a meal may cost over \$500, we elected sloppy mudbugs and beignets with lots of white sugar power. I don't know who started it (me) but soon our little corner of the outdoor restaurant looked like we were hit by a snow storm. As the proprietors were getting ready to throw us out, our handy, dandy limo driver pulled up just in time and off into the night we went.

Like little kids, we laughed at how much fun someone could have with the simple things in life.. A trade show we will never forget.

**“Smart people
learn from
everything and
everyone,
average
people from
their
experiences,
stupid people
already have
all the
answers.”**

Socrates



OKRA

Back in my old ACI days, I had the opportunity to go to dinner with Bob King who owns Kings Telemessaging Service in Shreveport, LA. He said that if you want the real Louisiana than “Catfish Haven” is the place for you. Being from Vermont, all that hot southern cooking was lost to me until my first visit.

We dined on catfish, crawdads, cornpone, collard greens and something I had never heard of – Okra. I tasted it and could find no real pleasure in this green root that had the taste of boot. Bob and Carol King became good friends to the point that we would exchange gifts at Christmas. And every year, wrapped in bubble wrap was a jar of guess what – Okra.

At this point I did not want to hurt Bob’s feelings so I started a wall of Okra in my cellar. When the King’s came to Montana for a small vacation and to visit the Hobbit House, Bob noticed the “Wall of Okra” and wondered – what the hell? You see he thought I liked the stuff so as a nice guy – kept sending the boot leather for years until I said, “I can’t keep up the charade any longer” – I told Bob, I hate Okra and the jar it comes in.

Being the prankster he is, every time we would travel to a trade show and possibly stay in a B&B, Bob would find out what room I was in and waiting on the bed was a big jar of Okra. The staff of the B&B had a great time playing this little prank on me – leaving me wondering, how did Bob know? One thing Bob remembers about the okra story when it arrived at the dining table is me asking “What is that? Is it animal, mineral or vegetable?” and Bob just said “it’s okra!” That was priceless!



Remember the Rules

Golf! What fun in Denver where the TAS attendees divided themselves up into teams to play 18 holes. Rules... What rules!



My partner was Steven Diels from Redondo Beach, California. We were having a good round and could see that Darlene Campbell was following behind us. Now knowing that Darlene is a real stickler when it comes to the rules of golf, we decided to line the top of the hole with goose poop. The rules state something about not moving any objects in front of the hole leaving Darlene to have to do a bunt shot to clear her ball of over barrage of nasty stuff.

Steven and I were hiding in the bushes to see Darlene’s face turn to a bright red as she looked around for the culprits. Finally, years after the incident I told Darlene that it was me and she was not surprised. An avid golfer is true to the rules.



**“Everything
you can
imagine is
real.”**

Pablo Picasso

COFFEE!

It was my first time hosting a major Expo for the answering service industry. The vendors group (ATMS - Association of TeleMessaging Suppliers) had joined forces to offer TAS owners a show put on for the owners but also made it very clear that when the vendor booths were open... there would be no other conflicting classes.

Our keynote speaker was the noted Dr. Norman Vincent Peale who after giving his speech walked around the vendor area taking the time to introduce himself and asking what that particular vendor was selling. And of course allowing pictures to be taken.



I was pretty smitten with the precision the conference had taken, even delivering a bottle of wine to the different booths with the ATMS logo on the side. As one of the classes let out, I heard a ruckus out in the hall where they were serving coffee. Not being a coffee drinker, I had forgotten to cover every break as our attendees were now devouring the Dental Convention coffee display which was being held in the same hotel.

I had the kitchen bring up gallons of coffee for our attendees as I apologized to the other group for my mistake. Really, that was the only mishap and I learned my lesson – COFFEE at every break.

SURE SHOT

At some of the ATSI conventions, concurrent sessions for the attendees will run while the vendor hall is open. When that happens, the vendors mill around chatting, waiting for the next break. At one of these breaks, Jim Becker from Amtelco was holding up a wine glass by the stem. With a big bowl of tootsie rolls nearby, I grabbed one tootsie roll by the tip and flung it sideways at Jim, hitting the stem of his glass and actually severing it in two.



I knew I was a good shot hunting squirrels and rabbits in Vermont but to hit a ¼ inch stem at about 25" was pure luck.



**“Keep your
face always
toward the
sunshine, and
shadows will
fall behind
you.”**

Walt Whitman

CANDID SHOTS



*CHOICES CHOICES
Both of these elevator doors opened at the same time
Do you select door # 1 or door # 2 for your ride?*



*COMMUTE TO WORK
No traffic jams up here...*



Your supposed to break the shell.



*Competition can be fierce down on the
showroom floor... the Vulcan
Death Grip*



There is always one before his time...

Where it Began

This is the story of how a 36-year-old southern bell found the telephone answering service industry. Necessity IS the mother of invention.

In 1948, Aline King, my mom, operated a small gift shop in the bottom floor of a hotel in Shreveport, LA. She sold coffee, doughnuts, and religious gifts. Salesmen who stayed in the hotel would stop by for their morning coffee and chat with her.

HER FIRST CUSTOMER

One morning an Eastman Kodak representative from Dallas was complaining that his company was requiring him to open an office, hire a secretary and have her answer the phone. Her job was to take and relay messages to him from any customers. He thought it was a lot of expense. Aline asked if he could install his phone next to the cash register and she would answer in his company name, as his telephone secretary from 8am to 5pm Mon-Fri. Voila, her first TAS account!

HER SECOND CUSTOMER

A young architect had an office on the other side of the wall from Aline's gift shop. He needed to be out of the office most of the day, so they drilled a hole through the wall and placed his phone next to the cash register and she would answer that phone as Ralph Kiper Architect.

NUMBER THREE

Again, another businessman on the other side of the wall... He was originally from the Middle East and had a strong accent which many locals could not understand. Aline drilled another hole through the wall and installed the third phone next to the cash register. When he would be on a phone call and the other person couldn't understand him, he would knock on the wall, and Aline would pick up the extension in her shop and act as a translator.

Someone told her that there were businesses in larger cities that were answering the telephones for doctors' offices during the night. So, she caught the train and rode to Dallas to meet Pearl Forrester, one of the original leaders of the telephone answering service industry. They became lifelong friends and Pearl mentored Mom in 1948, and then me in 1977 when I began working in the family business.

Mother eventually closed her gift shop and moved the answering service into another downtown hotel where she rented a room with a kitchenette. She stayed there 24/7 for 18 months, only leaving when my dad could relieve her since he had a full-time job of his own. She started the Doctors' Exchange and the Physicians' & Surgeons' exchange during that time.

Question: When you are sitting at a desk with thirty-seven black, desktop phones on it and one phone rings, how do you know which one it is?

Answer: You feel for the one that's vibrating..

Bob King

**"What lies
behind you
and what lies
in front of
you, pales in
comparison to
what lies
inside of you."**

Ralph Waldo Emerson



With a Little Help from My Friends

Prior to buying my first answering service in July of 1998 I decided to buy a business of my own. I lost my job in January of 1998 and I needed to find a company or job to help me pay my mortgage and feed my wife and two children. I knew I couldn't start something from scratch, without revenue and without an ability to pay my bills so I decided to go and look for an existing business that would allow me to turn my savings into cash flow.

To narrow my search I wrote down all the things I wanted and didn't want in a business, and I hit the internet businesses to buy sites. Early in the process I came across listings for telephone answering services on the businesses for sale site and the broker was Steve Michaels of TAS Marketing.

I reached out to Steve and he helped me sign up for his email list. He also gave me a free subscription to *Connections Magazine* where I would get my first taste of the business.

My first targets were three answering services that were for sale within an hour of my home. I built a business plan and started to raise money because these businesses were more than I could afford. Ultimately I signed a term sheet with a guy who had four small offices in my area and my fundraising had taken over my life.

During that time I also started reading *Connections Magazine* so I could learn as much about the business as possible. In one of the 1998 editions, Steve had written an article about Bill Robertshaw and I noticed Bill's office was around the corner from a guy whose business I had under a term sheet.

Since I was in fundraising mode I reached out to Bill to see if he would invest in me and my new business. We had a great meeting but he didn't have any interest in partnering on the deal I had structured. He made me promise I would call him back when I was an owner so we could see if we could work together in some way and I agreed.

Over the next few months of fundraising and due diligence I watched my deal fall apart. No one's fault but my bank (who was going to take an equity position, eventually bowed out). When I scheduled a meeting to tell the seller, I also scheduled a meeting with Bill figuring maybe he would give me a job.

After my meeting with the seller where I told him I would have to pass on the deal, I went to meet with Bill hoping to get a job. I had been out of work for six months and I had made a big dent in my savings. At the Thursday afternoon meeting Bill didn't offer me a job; instead, he offered me the opportunity to purchase half of one of his companies. He didn't have the details that day but the following day he faxed over three years of financials. We agreed I would meet him the next day... Saturday...to see if we could make a deal.

As most people know we made a deal that day. We memorialized it on a yellow piece of paper that is framed in my conference room. I handed Bill a check for my life savings and asked him to wait until Monday to deposit it so I could move funds from my savings to my checking.

The rest as they say is history...

Submitted by Gary Pudles

**"You define
your own life.
Don't let other
people write
your script."**

Oprah Winfrey

Now & Then - Gary Pudles

The THEN photo shows a bright young man with a glint in his eye looking toward the future in telephone answering. Then he got Steve Michaels phone number and gave him a call. Gary became an answering service owner that week. With his vast knowledge of equipment and acquisitions... we will be pleased to someday call him an ICON.



If you look at the NOW picture, you see a man who has lost it! You no longer see the business wisdom and clarity flow out his eyes ... but you do see him “at one” with his drums and enjoying his latest gig. Hat on backwards, funny sunglasses and where is his tie!

Gary is just one of many owners who have added other talents to their long, distinguished careers in the telemessaging industry.

Cheap is Cheap

Having served this industry these past 43 years, I’ve run into some funny stories. One of my better buyers had put an offer on a TAS in the Southeast. The final agreement took some time as the seller wanted to dicker – guess it was in his southern blood.

When my buyer went in on Monday morning, one of his staff quietly notified him that there was no toilet paper in the whole office!!



“I believe the second half of one’s life is meant to be better than the first half. The first half is finding out how you do it. And the second half is enjoying it”

Frances Lear
in the *Washington Post*

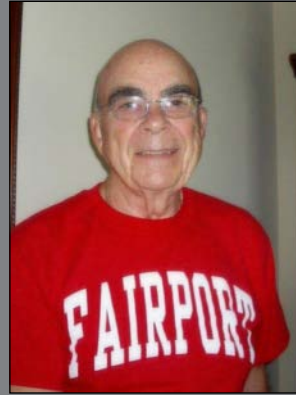
IN MEMORIAM



Sharon Grossman



Betty Ruth Edwards



Bob Martin



Alan Kalik



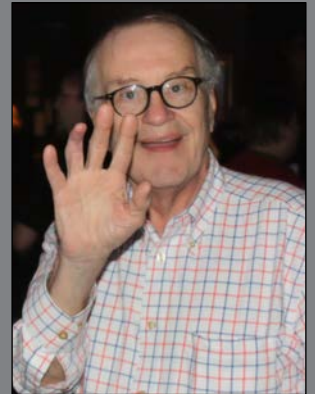
Cedric Adam



Sheryl Denny



Wilma Williams
(TAS Marketing)



Tom Gelbach



Frank Feldhaus



Warren Moody



Jerry Uht



Gwen Corbett



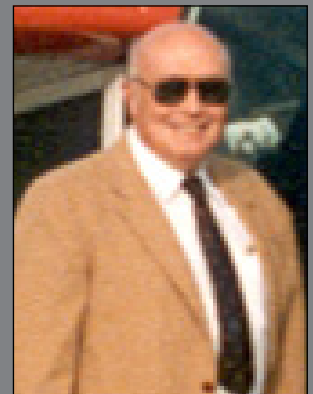
George Meyer



Judy Vincent



Mary Ann Wetmore



Bill Curtin