

# Housewives profit from plastic paradise

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ROCHESTER, N.Y. — More than 300 student and professional journalists assembled at the Americana Hotel in Rochester, N.Y. last weekend — to receive awards, exchange ideas and discuss ethics. But the focus was not on New York Times foreign correspondent Sydney Schanberg, or on Boston Herald photographer Stanley Forman, or even on Philadelphia Inquirer cartoonist Tony Auth.

Instead, the spotlight fell on 600 women clamoring for bicentennial-colored juice glasses and unbreakable ketchup dispensers. Hailing from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New York, they had congregated there for a regional Tupperware convention.

That weekend, the printing press was smothered by plastic. With fervor that would rival a Billy Graham Crusade, and gimmicks borrowed from "Let's Make a Deal," Tupperware executives urged a ballroom full of company managers to push their products.

Company profit was almost a dirty word. In keeping with the Billy Graham-like sales pitch, the women were told that the rewards for increased sales were reaped by those who did the most sowing.

"It's the best incentive-oriented selling program in the world," remarked one Syracuse husband who accompanied his wife to the convention.

Apparently, Tupperware philosophy maintains that the American female, despite the women's liberation movement, still prefers to spend her days at home — caring for her children, pleasing her husband, running a typical, efficient American household. But the company gameplan also upholds the idea that American females are happiest when their typical, efficient American home is filled with "pretty things."

Tupperware allows the typical, efficient American female to do both.

Marcie Booke graduated from college several years ago with an accounting degree. During a Tupperware party — the at-home social where products are demonstrated and sold — Marcie was approached about entering the business.

"I was highly insulted when someone asked me to sell Tupperware," she said. "I always thought they were women who couldn't get jobs."

Today, Marcie Booke's career as an accountant is far behind her; she has entered the Tupperware ranks. Today, Marcie Booke works five hours a day, five days a week — and earns \$14,000 a year.

As a Tupperware manager — a position that took her 11 weeks to achieve — Ann Marie Paige, Shewsbury, Mass., receives a new car every two years. Her insurance, tires, maintenance and repairs are paid for by the company. Her home, she claims, is almost totally furnished by gifts she received from Tupperware for an impressive sales record.

"I haven't bought Christmas presents in years," she boasts, "I just give away things Tupperware gave to me."

"A friend of mine has nine color TV sets," she continues. "She says she won't know what to do if they give her another one — she's running out of rooms to put them in."

"They're very good to us," remarked another manager. "I've had six new cars in the past six years — all station-wagons. Our conventions look like Ford conventions. There's so many stationwagons in the hotel parking lots."



**Pushing plastic**

Donning a garter belt and crocheted shawl, and arming himself with tempting bonus prizes, a Tupperware executive urges his managers to increase their sales. The pitch was part of a regional Tupperware convention held in Rochester, N.Y. last weekend.

This year Tupperware celebrates its 25th anniversary. According to Murray Scott, company executive, "Tupperware has grown every year since its beginning in 1951," even in periods of national economic decline. The company's success is unique, he says, in that until recently, Tupperware has never recruited salespersons through any of the national media.

In place of a mass commercial ad campaign, Tupperware relies on three cornerstones of American society for exposure: the housewife, the telephone and, most important, the "party."

According to Northeast Regional Coordinator John Nelson, the party plan concept originated in the 1940s with Stanley Home Products and was imitated by other shown-in-

the-home companies. "Our products need to be demonstrated," Nelson said. "Today you're lucky to get a store clerk to write up your receipt, let alone tell you what to buy and how to use it." The major strength in the party concept, he says, is that it takes a personal approach to the product.

In essence, what the party does is bring women into a neighbor's home, feed them cheesecake and coffee, give them a free set of plastic measuring spoons and let them play games reminiscent of a bridal shower.

Somewhere amidst the frivolity, a Tupperware representative demonstrates lettuce crispers, cake savers and hamburger makers — a plastic paradise designed to make the housewife's job run a little smoother.

A typical party, says one conventioner from Plainfield, Conn., yields about \$120 in sales, 25 per cent of which goes to the managers. In addition, managers receive a five per cent commission on sales made by persons they have recruited to host parties.

Although 98 per cent of Tupperware's managers are women, Tupperware executive agree that male managers usually can sell more.

"A group of women won't feel as pressured by a man," says Pauline Joyal. "Women are more critical of other women. They'll sit at a party and think about the saleswoman's clothes instead of what she's saying."

For Joyal, Tupperware is a family affair. Not only does her husband share her profession as a Tupperware manager, but her mother and father met each other while working on a Tupperware assembly line.

While Joyal's lineage may be somewhat unusual, the family nonetheless remains paramount in the company ideology. Shades of Marabel Morgan's "Total Woman" philosophy filter through the company's ranks.

"In Tupperware, the family has to come first," says a cum laude graduate of Moravian College who now sells Tupperware. "The family must be happy or the saleswoman will not be happy."

"It's a husband-wife thing," her husband adds. "The wife may hold the parties, but the husband is right there to support her."

The couple explained that support is often needed when the manager attempts to recruit dealers to deliver the pitch at parties.

"Often women will object because their husbands want them at home or are afraid to have them out at night. Or they'll resist because they don't think they can get a babysitter," he says.

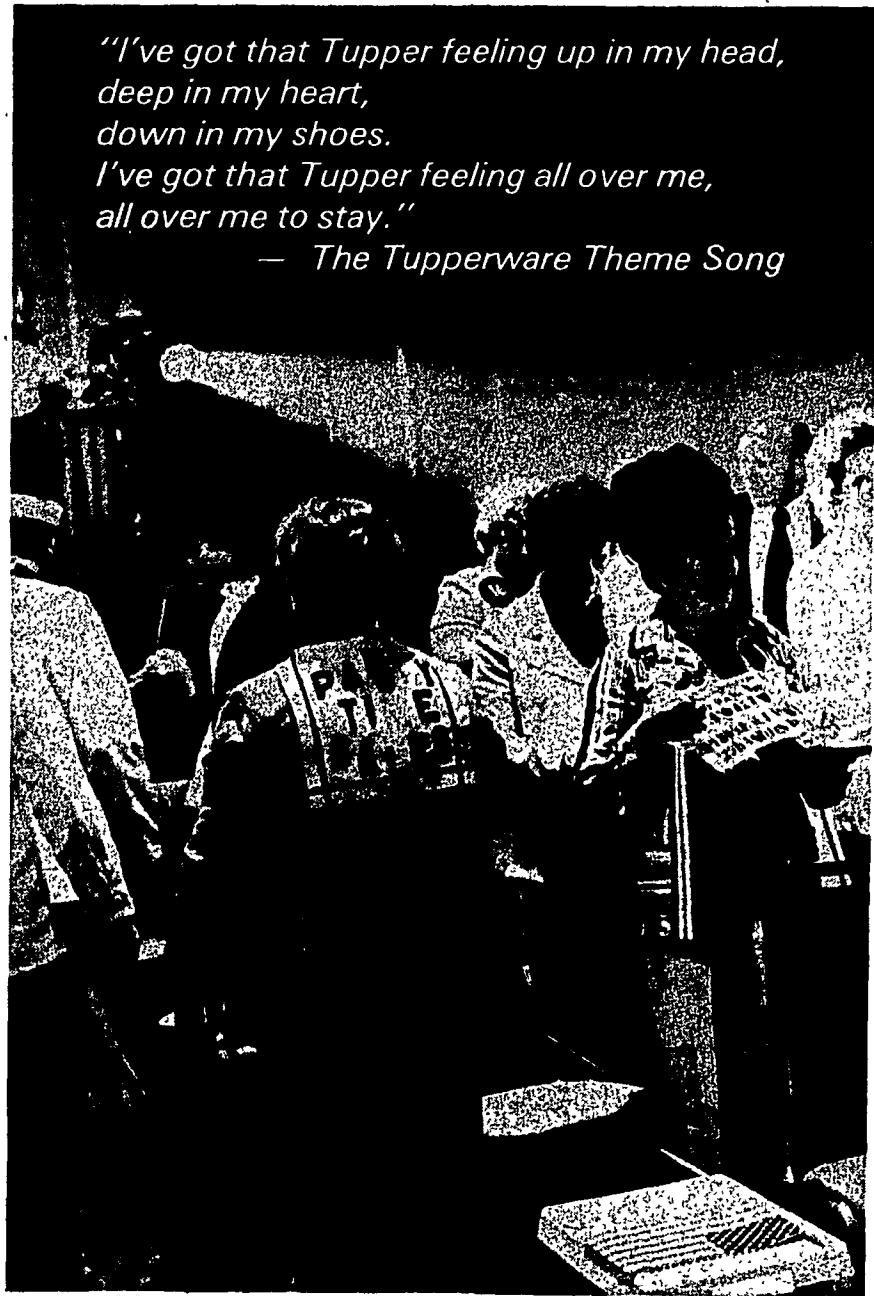
"That's where I come in. I'll talk to the husband and tell him I had those same objections and things worked out."

And so, the convention continued, with slap-stick skits and multi-media exhibits of stereos and dinette sets. The women, clad in look-a-like blue polyester suits or sailor-style blazers, squeal with delight when a new product is announced or a new prize is introduced.

They are veterans — their bosoms decked with medals and honor pins — and they emulated enthusiasm no political convention could match.

Soon, however, tumblers and trophies are packed away. The Tupperware conventioners leave, dreaming of another 25 years of plastic prosperity.

Best wishes. Happy Anniversary. Sydney Schanberg, we apologize.



"I've got that Tupper feeling up in my head,  
deep in my heart,  
down in my shoes.  
I've got that Tupper feeling all over me,  
all over me to stay."  
— The Tupperware Theme Song

Clockwise from left: Tumblers, jello molds and celery bins are old favorites in the Tupperware repertoire of plastic products; after finishing a stirring rendition of the Tupperware theme song, managers pick up sales kits and bonus prizes; tupperware manager Lily Benton, of Concord, N.H., proudly flaunts the awards she received for an impressive sales record. At the conclusion of the Tupperware convention, company executives introduce the product "every household has been waiting for" — a hot dog storage case.



Photos by Ira Joffe and Julie Cipolla