



Seats with a View

A local company that sits well with all its customers, Sharp Seating is a storied Pasadena mainstay.

FOR MOST PASADENANS, THE ROSE PARADE IS A FAVORITE TRADITION AND SOMETHING THEY ANTICIPATE EACH YEAR. BUT FOR SINDEE RIBOLI—PRESIDENT OF SHARP SEATING COMPANY, THE OFFICIAL ROSE PARADE TICKET SELLER—IT'S HER LIFE AND A PART OF WHO SHE IS. "THE TOURNAMENT OF ROSES HAS BEEN IMPORTANT TO OUR FAMILY FOREVER," said Riboli. Over the years, her family's connections to the Rose Parade have continued to run deep. Her father, Mike Brown, grew up in Pasadena "right off the parade route," she said, "on the same street as the Valley Hunt Club," to which her father's family belonged. Club members founded the Tournament of Roses in 1890.

But it was about 60 years ago when Brown was a boy on his bicycle route in Pasadena that the grandstand business entered his life. "He found a little box of tickets under the grandstand," Riboli said. "He turned it in to the Milne brothers," who built grandstands along the parade route.

"Jack Milne was so impressed with my father for finding these tickets and returning them," she said, "they gave front-row seats to my dad and his family to come to the Rose Parade."

"Then my dad went to work for Jack Milne as a teenager," Riboli continued. "Jack Milne suggested, 'This might be a good business for you.' So my dad said, 'OK, let's go!' He gave my

// STORY BY MICHELE MILES GARDINER

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father the seed money."

Brown's first job was to build seating for Riverside Raceway, and his second job was the Rose Parade. "My father is brilliant," Riboli said. "His whole life was building structures for events. ... He invented a rolling stage." He also built all the scaffolding for the TV cameras during the Tournament of Roses, she noted.

"Back in the '60s," Riboli continued, "my father used to build grandstands for Dave Sharp, who owned Sharp Seating. ... When Dave Sharp was getting ready to retire, about 25 years ago, he didn't have anyone to give the business to; he offered it to my father. So my father bought Sharp Seating."

After a few years, her father asked her if she would want to run the business. "My background is accounting," Riboli said. "So I thought, well, I'm not really a PR person. ... I'll give it a year. And, I'll tell you, I've never looked back."

Today, as president of Sharp Seating, Riboli is in charge of marketing, leases and permits; she sells the tickets for the Rose Parade and pre- and post-parade events, and she arranges for construction of the TV scaffolding and 100,000 seats. Her dad, who is semi-retired, still helps pull permits and oversees the grandstand building along the parade route.

"It's a happy business," she said. "We're helping to provide seating for a fun event—a New Year's Day celebration. So when people come here during the last week, we have lines around the corner, people coming from out of town. ... They want to buy tickets to the parade. It's wonderful, and it's energizing. They're dressed in their fall clothes, and they're happy and with family."

Some parade-goers are so enamored with the event that they attend it each year, Riboli noted. "It's their family tradition." And not only do people come for the parade and events (float decorating, Equestfest and the football game, to name a few), many people enjoy walking up and down Orange Grove Boulevard on midnight of New Year's morning to look at the floats lined up, she said.

As for her own many Rose Parade experiences, Riboli recalls when her father put her and her brother in a trash bin and hoisted it high above on a forklift so they could watch the parade. Or when, as a teen, she stayed up all night at Pasadena City College only to sleep through the parade.

But for the last 23 years, Riboli has no time to sleep on Rose Parade day. Not only is she busy running Sharp Seating, but she and her dad volunteer as "white suiters" during

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Sindee Riboli, Sharp Seating president, will never forget one young U.S. soldier, just back from duty with Desert Storm, who found out he was dying from melanoma. He only had a few months to live when his mother called Riboli to say, "He wants to go to the Rose Parade." Deeply touched, Riboli gave them a couple of front-row tickets.

The March after the soldier attended the Rose Parade, Riboli recalled, with deep sadness, how his mother phoned with news that her son had died. She called to tell Riboli about the memorable day she spent with her son at the parade. "We had the best day," the soldier's mother said. "It was such a beautiful day."

the Tournament of Roses, where they may do anything from ride scooters beside the floats to assist visitors.

"The Tournament of Roses has so many facets to get involved in," Riboli stated, adding that the association gives back to many causes.

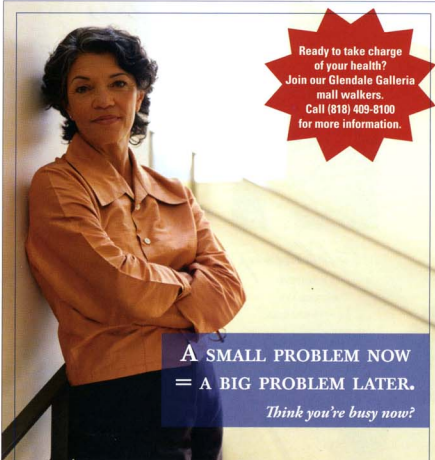
Her company also believes in giving back to the community. "Sharp Seating," she said, "hires about 500 volunteers of our own to run all our grandstands and parking lots on parade morning. We often work with churches, and then we donate back to the church." Riboli works with other organizations as well, such as high school bands or the Boy Scouts; in return for their time, Riboli contributes to their group.

"Sharp Seating, the Tournament of Roses and the city of Pasadena, really, all work together," said Riboli, "and this event turns out beautifully every year."

While many people will watch the Rose Parade on TV, Riboli said, "There's nothing like being there. People say to me, 'Oh, gosh, I don't want to get up that early and haul myself out of here.' Well, once you get seated and you've cracked open your Thermos, there's just nothing like seeing it in person ... seeing all the detail that goes into making all these floats ... It's fun. And then it's over and we start all over."

For tickets to the Rose Parade and events, visit sharpseating.com.

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