

ICLA | CORNER

I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE...

We have a new marketing slogan here at Ohio State to help tell stories about our alums and their experiences. You begin the sentence “But for Ohio State ...” and add your story of how the university helped you achieve whatever goal or accomplishment you obtained. I’ll start my stroll down collegiate licensing’s memory lane with “But for Ohio State licensing ...” Man, I can’t even imagine.



Rick Van Brimmer



What’s really hard for me to imagine is that I have spent the better part of the past 22 years in Ohio State’s trademark licensing office, a place I barely knew existed when I started full time in athletics communications here in 1985. But five years later an interview with Anne Chasser for a newly formed position would change my life. As fate would have it, I got the job, and began a wonderful career in licensing with a woman who would become not just a boss, but a treasured friend. I kid Anne that I learned from the “mother of all licensing” since Ohio State, under Anne’s direction, was one of the first to begin a licensing program.

It’s funny now to think about it, but I remember as a freshman at Ohio State in 1975, I read an article in the student newspaper about the university starting a licensing program, and that royalties would “add about five cents to the cost of a spiral notebook” according to the bookstore manager. That’s a true story, and one that I have no idea why, but it was committed to my long-term memory.

Like a lot of us, I spent most of my early days in licensing chasing down infringers — writing cease and desist letters, canvassing flea markets and swap meets, and patrolling the campus on gamedays. One of my favorite memories was working with our Vendor Detail on a particularly busy gameday situation that involved an out-of-town (and very sophisticated) counterfeiting operation.

They would bring street kids down from New York City in vans, set them out into our parking lots with exactly a dozen shirts under their arms, and then send them back out again when their bundle was sold.

We had stopped this same kid three times, and as we were explaining our seizure order to him just inside the stadium, he told the officer, “Could you hurry, man, I need to get back out there.”

I emphatically told him he wasn’t going anywhere, since he had already been caught three times.

He argued that he needed to start making up his deficit since we had confiscated his shirts each time.

Again, I said “You are not going anywhere this time.”

With his juvenile street-honed bravado, this 12-year-old looked at me and said “Man, you need to get a life. It’s just t-shirts.”

Well, I’ve had a life, thank you.

And it hasn’t been just t-shirts.

It’s been a career full of wonderful relationships, wonderful experiences and wonderful accomplishments and successes I’ve seen happen here, that I have been grateful to be a part of.

Anne laid the groundwork and when licensed apparel took off in the mid-to-late-80s, I just grabbed on and enjoyed the ride. I was here when we made our first million dollars in royalties, watched it double, and saw it surge past \$5 million in a single year. When you thought it just had to slow down, it kept rising to \$10 million. Do you think anyone really thought a collegiate program could make that kind of money?

Along the way I became active in ACLA, served on the Board for several years, and was honored to serve as President for two terms. I can’t tell you how much that meant to my development within the profession, and probably even more, my development as a person by learning from the leadership experiences and opportunities I was given, and the people I learned from along the way. I’ve always coached people to “get involved!” because the returns always outweigh your investment. At least they did for me.

At the risk of sounding like “an old guy,” and as previous columns have addressed, so much has changed during the past 25 years. No more NSGA show in Chicago, no more Super Show in Atlanta. No more art slicks. No more hand-written royalty ledgers. No more index cards (yes, those of us who remember Jean Barrett at Penn State remember her 2000 licensees cataloged on index cards). No more Karaoke parties at conferences (probably a good thing as I think about it).

But the people — there will always be the people. The one constant through the years was the collegial attitude and helpful, gracious nature of the people who make up our industry.

Need a form, a policy, a legal interpretation? You got it. Need a shoulder to cry on or someone to stand up at your wedding (yes, there was a wedding on the Riverwalk in San Antonio after an ACLA event)? You got it. We shared our work, and we shared our lives.

It’s always been about the people. The roots of this organization go back to that small group in Chicago, and what they planted grew well because we nurtured each other. It’s really unlike any other organization I have ever been a part of, and I cherish the special friends I have made, and kept, through the years.

“But for ACLA/NCLA/ICLA...” Can’t even imagine it any other way. Don’t want to. Just happy to savor the memories, and at the same time know our future is in great hands.

Here’s to the next 25 years. Cheers!

Rick Van Brimmer is the director, trademark and licensing at Ohio State.