

Smart Research: Learning About "Hidden Jewels"

Rebecca and I had the opportunity 14 years ago to attend an event at the home of **Len Roberts and his wife, Laurie**, at their 4400 Overton Crest estate.

Rebecca was serving on the board of directors of Hugworks, an organization that provided music therapy for children in hospitals.

Since Len's most recent leadership position had been as CEO of **RadioShack**, Rebecca conducted some research to learn more about our host's previous career in the restaurant industry. There was no need to ask the same old questions about RadioShack. He had heard them all.

She correctly presumed that everyone in Fort Worth recognized his affiliation with **RadioShack**, then one of the city's largest and most prominent employers, so Rebecca committed to changing the direction of the conversation.

When we were introduced to Mr. Roberts, he immediately said, "Please call me Len."

Rebecca asked the magic question that elevated the entire evening:

"What was it like to be CEO of Arby's? I love their food."

The smile that came across Len's face was priceless as his eyes lit up with excitement. "I love to talk about Arby's," he said. "Please, both of you come up to my office and let me show you something."

We swiftly made our way up the grand spiral staircase and turned toward his office. Inside, Len opened a drawer and showed us a copy of **Restaurants & Institutions** magazine that featured him on the cover. He said, "I've got a bunch of these, so please take this one."

There, in his office, he told stories about his leadership of **Arby's**. You should have seen the passion and enthusiasm he had for the popular restaurant chain. His leadership position there included many high points of his life. Even one of Len's best moments as CEO of RadioShack referenced his time at **Arby's**.

He reflected on the time he was standing on stage during the massive **Consumer Electronics Show** – the largest convention in Las Vegas every year.

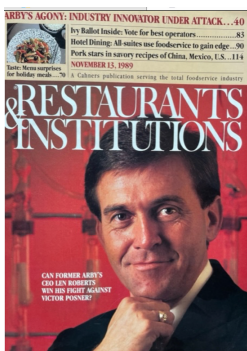
"I was on the stage with **Bill Gates** from **Microsoft**, **Steve Jobs** from **Apple**, and **Larry Ellison** from **Oracle**," he recalled. "Each of us was asked to say, in a single sentence, what we had done to benefit the human race."

"Bill Gates said that Microsoft had developed the language for computers, and he received a soft courtesy applause, much like you hear on a golf course during a tournament."

"Steve Jobs stated that Apple made computing less complicated and easier for individuals to use. Again, there was a polite 'golf clap'."

"Next came Larry Ellison from Oracle, who said that his company helped the computers communicate with one another. More polite applause."

"So, there I am – the RadioShack CEO. I have nothing to share on the level of innovation as these luminaries, and I was batting last. I don't know what made me say it, but I smiled and said, 'I used to be the CEO of Arby's, and I brought Curly Fries to America!'"



Len Roberts best known as boss of RadioShack but, wow, did he like running Arby's



RadioShack®

Standing Ovation!

The smile on Len's face was electric simply because Rebecca had invited him to share something fun from his past that others rarely asked him about.

Len regaled us with stories about his interactions with Arby's franchisees and how he grew sales and profits. During his four years as CEO, Arby's grew by 900 locations.

That represents a lot of Curly Fries!

As we were winding down so he could return to hosting his guests, Rebecca asked about "the bell." She had read that Arby's locations had a bell mounted on a wall that customers could ring as they left to recognize a positive dining experience.

Once again, his passion was evident as he told stories of extraordinary service and bell-ringing, and how he constantly inspired his location employees by proudly ringing the bell on his way out.

I asked if we could take him to lunch at an Arby's location soon and he quickly agreed, giving us his email address.

The next week, I emailed Len and he agreed to meet us at the Arby's on Alta Mesa Boulevard just west of Woodway in Southwest Fort Worth.

At lunch, Len, Rebecca, and I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation, our Arby's Classic Roast Beef and, of course, Curly Fries. True to form, on the way out, Len enthusiastically rang the bell and then told the shift manager that he had been CEO of Arby's many years earlier.

We learned three lessons from our encounter with Len Roberts:

- **Everybody has some hidden story they would gladly share if someone knew to ask them.**
- **When you show sincere interest in someone, they are quite likely to become equally interested in you.**
- **We all need to find a way to celebrate our successes – whether ringing a bell or whatever it may be; it's part of having fun!**

And one more thing: Curly Fries are a national treasure, and we have Len Roberts to thank for that gift to America!



Smart Move: Pandemic Pivots

What smart moves did you take to improve your business from 2020 to 2022 that are still serving you well today?

I led the **Empowering Business** seminar on Wednesday, March 22, for the **Cleburne Chamber of Commerce**. My client **Grandview Bank** sponsored the presentation.

My co-presenters were **Jimmie Hughes**, owner of **Jimmie's Restaurant** in downtown Cleburne, and **Aaron Siler**, Director of Operations for The **Plaza Theatre**, also located in downtown.

We can learn a LOT from small-town businesses. Please consider these lessons:

- Jimmie's full-service restaurant immediately lost business due to Covid mandates. His response: **He bought a vending machine that held 40 meals or desserts** – each one prepared for two people. Once he sent the word out on social media, he sold out of these items every day – in addition to the custom meals that customers ordered to go.
- Aaron Siler said when Covid closed down his weekly performances, **he immediately acquired a low-power FM transmitter** (the same equipment that drive-in movies use to send quality sound to your car). With the quality sound and social distancing observed, The Plaza Theatre was **the first performing arts venue in Texas** to employ this innovation and provide its community with continued performances.

Examples of Larger enterprises:

- **Airlines** that lost 90% of their passenger service **pivoted to cargo-only flights**
- **Fitness centers moved their workouts online**
- **Restaurant chefs offered free classes in how to prepare meals** and sold the ingredients for pick-up so the customers could enjoy the same in-restaurant quality
- **Many grocery stores** closed locations that they used as **dedicated fulfillment centers**
- **Healthcare organizations innovated** – (James L. West Center for Dementia Care deployed **Ultra-Violet (UV) ray robots to sanitize rooms** and hallways, and sanitized the shoes of everyone walking in)
- **Red Roof Motels** offered **day rates for workers**: \$29/day with fast WiFi for daytime hours
- **Coca-Cola canned water**





Tiebreaker: Giant Easter Bunny

It's the age-old question: How do I make my product stand out?

German American Robert Strohecker wanted his chocolate Easter bunny to stand out above all others, so he created a massive five-foot-tall chocolate Easter Bunny in 1890 to display in retail stores.

The promotion worked!

Customers flocked to see his giant display in stores and snatched up – and gobbled up – his smaller versions of the chocolate bunny created for Harbor Sweets Handmade Chocolates.

His innovation had a profound impact on his industry and, most specifically, on his company's sales.

**What innovations are you concocting to become YOUR five-foot chocolate rabbit?
Feel free to call Fletch at 817-205-2334 to discuss how to
position and message YOUR innovation!**