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»» **BUYING BLUES**

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GEARTRENDS

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welcome



Susan Mantle Photography

WELCOME!

Being special should be the norm, not the exception. Especially in the specialty industry, where it's nothing short of vital to be special, whether you are a retailer, rep, distributor, consultant, supplier, manufacturer, publisher or journalist.

Being special means you are working every minute of every day to ensure that your customers' experiences are somehow special each and every time they have contact with your brand or your company. We would argue that being special is not measured merely by customer satisfaction, higher quality products, price points or fancy merchandising. Being special has everything to do with creating emotional connections with your customers that, in turn, lead to loyalty to your brand, whatever that may be.

We would also argue that creating such emotional connections really isn't all that hard. Sure, it takes daily effort, but it's really just about connecting with each customer on basic values such as respect, pride, integrity, fairness, honesty and trust.

In the SNEWS® retail survey on page 94, we were amazed at the number of retailers who told us that they had listed a company as "best" simply because it took care of retailer problems efficiently, honestly, fairly and had a customer service team that took pride in its work. Companies that earned the "most difficult to work with" were consistently cited as being poor when it came to communicating with retailers, plus what was offered came with no sense of integrity and fairness.

Less than satisfactory retail adventures are also in the Mystery Shopper article, starting on page 54. In it, we detail the experiences of three GearTrends® operatives at four stores around the country. Not one experience even came close to achieving what we might pray for or imagine as special. Concerning? Indeed. As a result, we have launched a column in SNEWS®—www.snewsnet.com—titled, "Desperately Seeking Specialty." At regular intervals, we will report in SNEWS® online about our operatives' experiences, good and bad (and we do really hope there will be more good than bad) in specialty retail stores around the country. We are doing this to remind ourselves that the customer can only care about us, our brands and our industry, if we give him or her a reason to care—and that reason had better be more than just price.

Our mission statement underscores our commitment to serving the industry with integrity, fairness, honesty, pride and respect. It says, "We at the GearTrends® Network take our motto of 'Creating Community Through Communication' very seriously, and to that end, we promise inspiration, truth and open discussion in a way that is always curious, but never too serious."

We expect every member of our SNEWS® and GearTrends® team to hold him- or herself and our company to a higher standard. We publish news and stories with the intention of educating, challenging, inspiring debate, offering up a chuckle and, hopefully, providing a platform we can all use to ensure our industry is always working toward improvement. We will never be satisfied with only one side of a story—sometimes to the irritation of those whom we contact to push for the real truth behind the spin. There is no doubt that we are not always perfect, despite our best intentions. And when we do trip up or stumble, we promise we won't duck from the responsibility of admitting a mistake and correcting it.

Through it all, as you've heard us say before, our philosophy is that you can't have too much fun. After all, it's far too easy to take this business of selling products for playing around outdoors and being active and fit a little too seriously.

Thank you for finding a special place in your heart for us, our magazines and our news as we enter our third year. Your loyalty in advertising, subscribing, emailing, calling, supporting and, yes, challenging our efforts is more appreciated than you know. You inspire us to be special. We promise to keep delivering.

Thanks for being a part,

Michael Hodgson and Therese Iknoian
Co-publishers
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contributors



THOSE WHO MAKE THE GEARS TURN AT GEARTRENDS®



MICHAEL HODGSON is an award-winning journalist and author of numerous books including "Camping For Dummies," "Compass and Map Navigator" and "Facing the Extreme." He continues to pen articles for select consumer magazines, including a regular humor column for *Hooked on the Outdoors*. He was the founder of Adventure 16's Wilderness Outings program and garnered extensive retail experience as a store manager there, before becoming the general manager for Western Mountaineering. Michael also served as an editor for *Outdoor Retailer* magazine where he helped launch the *Daily Exposure*.



THERESE IKNOIAN is an award-winning and internationally published fitness/sports journalist, has written numerous books, including "Mind-Body Fitness For Dummies" and "Fitness Walking," and continues to write for magazines such as *Trail Runner*. She worked as a news reporter for the San Jose Mercury News (where she was on the 1990 Pulitzer Prize-winning news team), and has a master's degree in exercise physiology. As an avid athlete and fitness enthusiast, Therese was a nationally ranked race walker, and now participates in adventure races, trail running, mountain biking and whatever else catches her fancy.



MARCUS WOOLF has worked as a journalist in the outdoor industry for nine years and served as editor for *Outdoor Retailer* magazine. In 2002, he returned to his home state of Alabama where he works as a freelance writer for the GearTrends® Network and consumer publications such as *Backpacker* and *Hooked on the Outdoors*. Marcus hikes and paddles throughout the country, and he is one of the few outdoor trade and consumer journalists who specializes in exploring and testing gear in the South.



SHARON LEICHAM has been a merchandiser and marketer for more than 20 years working with both large and small manufacturers and retailers, such as Royal Robbins, Specialized Bicycle, Sierra Designs and *Outdoor Retailer* magazine. Sharon is the author of "Merchandising Your Way to Success" and "How to Sell to Women." She offers merchandising advice on her website, www.merchandisingHUB.com.



JIM MOSS is a risk management consultant and attorney whose clients range from manufacturers and importers to independent representatives and retailers, as well as outfitters and federal concessionaires. He currently represents a variety of outdoor industry organizations and companies. Jim is also the manager of the GearTrends® Law Review division at www.snewsnet.com/lawreview.



CLYDE SOLES is the former gear editor for *Rock & Ice* and *Trail Runner* magazines, and has a decade of experience as a professional equipment tester. On top of that, he spent a decade in outdoor retail and has been climbing and skiing since the wood age. His latest book, "Climbing: Training for Peak Performance," was published by The Mountaineers.



BERNE BROUDY has been a critical commentator on outdoor gear her entire life, and began putting her observations into print six years ago. She spends intensive and extensive time in the field putting gear to the test. Berne's home base is in Richmond, Vt., where she writes and photographs for consumer magazines and the GearTrends® Network.



CHRIS HARGES is a partner at Satellite Design, a San Francisco graphic design firm specializing in corporate identity, packaging and POP. Before founding Satellite Design, he managed marketing communications programs for outdoor retailers and manufacturers including Eastern Mountain Sports and The North Face. After 10 years of association with the industry, he may finally have all the gear he needs. Ha!



PRIDE WRIGHT is an activist, journalist, publisher and outdoor retailer, roughly in that order. He publishes an alternative rag in the Central Sierra called *The Harbinger*. He is also the founder of the Brushwood Institute, which explores the relationships between environmental stewardship, sustainable economics, holistic health and cultural vitality.



BOB WOODWARD started his career in the outdoor business at Sierra Designs in 1971. After leaving SD, he drifted into journalism, first with World Publications and later with Times-Mirror Magazines and CBS Magazines. Woody returned to the world of freelancing as a writer and photographer after selling SNEWS®—which he founded in 1982—to current owners/publishers Michael and Therese in 2001.

BEHIND THE CURTAINS OF OZ ≈



WENDY GEISTER has been an outdoor lover and journalist for more than 12 years. After a long tenure at *Outdoor Retailer* magazine, and its affiliates the *Daily Exposure* and *Fly-Fishing Retailer*, Wendy joined the GearTrends Network® in 2002. She enjoys kayaking, camping, skiing, kickboxing and traveling.



JOHN DAVIDSON has been an outdoorsman since the first time his mother took him camping in Yosemite at age 6. He has hiked all the major points in the Valley, including five summits of Half Dome. John was art director of *Outdoor Retailer* and *Daily Exposure* for six years prior to hopping onto the GearTrends® Network in 2002.

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