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HOME ACCENTS TODAY®

IS SEEING BELIEVING?

Virtual technology—including this rendering—is worth a double take

Artistic Collection

IMC, THE COOK'S WAREHOUSE

Mary Moore

BY ALLISON ZISKO



Mary Moore treasures the cash register she used to play "shop" with her uncle when she was a child.

AT A GLANCE

What's one thing — personal or professional — you wish you could do better?

Make the time to write and send notes the way my grandmother taught me.

What's one household chore you can't stand doing?

Washing lettuce and laundry.

How do you like to spend your free time?

Golfing, cooking and traveling.

Have you read any good books lately?

"Mindset" by Dr. Carol S. Dweck.

have a crepe pan with us. So we got into a cab and went to all these gourmet stores looking for the pan. After about eight stores with no luck, my friend said, "I know who will have it." We went to Bridge Kitchenware and it was this dusty place with a grumpy owner, but it had everything, including the crepe pan. And I thought to myself, "This is it! I want to do this in Atlanta." I didn't know how or when, but I knew I wanted to have a shop like that in Atlanta, where people would know to go when they needed anything. My goal was to be "The Resource" for all things cooking.

Tell us about how you came to the decision to leave The Cook's Warehouse and embark on a new career.

I met Dorothy Belshaw [IMC's executive vice president, chief marketing and customer officer] about 20 years ago and we became immediate friends. I have always admired her work in the industry. A couple of years ago, she started talking with me about IMC's digital initiative and I became involved with some of the ideation sessions related to the project exploration. Over time I became more interested in being involved with the project in a more formalized role and we began those discussions. I like building and growing things, I like start-ups, I like to stretch myself and my skills. And I think this is where my leadership skills come to bear. This gives me the chance to join a much larger team and build something new and exciting that will give back to the industry I love and

Mary Moore, an independent retailer who founded The Cook's Warehouse in Atlanta 26 years ago, recently stepped back from the day to day management of her store to join the digital team at International Market Centers. Moore spoke with Home Accents Today about what it was like to make that career change and how she hopes to help her fellow retailers in her new role.

What made you open The Cook's Warehouse?

My dad was an entrepreneur and my brothers and I worked for him growing up. I always had this innate desire to be a business person. My uncle and I used to play shop. I'd give him a basket and we'd go down into the basement and he would put tools in it and I would ring him up. I guess you could say I was destined to be a retailer.

I've [also] always had a passion for food. I grew up on a farm and did a lot of cooking with my grandmother, my mother and my great-aunts. I cooked professionally to pay my way through college and rose to top leadership roles in the restaurant group for which I worked. One day a friend, who was working at the grocery chain Harry's Farmers Market, called to see if I would be interested in working there. I joined the research and development team and six months later was promoted to director of research and development.

My colleague and I were going up to New York to cook on behalf of Harry's at the Green Market and realized we didn't

the business I built. The reward of challenging and meaningful work is invigorating to me.

Will you remain involved in the stores in any way? I still own The Cook's Warehouse but have turned the day-to-day management over to my team. I have been blessed with an exceptional, passionate team who cares deeply about our customers and the business. I see their ability to lead and they have fresh, new and better ideas — that's what you want. I've always said that "I'm screwing up if I'm not hiring people smarter than I am." It's exciting for me to watch them grow and it allows me to do exciting new things as well.

You've been named SVP of omnichannel buyer engagement and digital operations at IMC. What does that job entail? It's a two-pronged role, with both internal (digital operations) and external (omni-channel buyer engagement) responsibilities. Internally, I am serving as a liaison between IMC's di and current IMC shared services. The focus is on helping to ensure continuity across cross-functional teams and working on special projects as we build JuniperMarket, a robust B2B digital marketplace, and JuniperCommerce, a vendor-facing suite of solutions for data management, e-commerce, CRM and more.

The buyer engagement part of my role involves bringing buyers back to physical markets and getting them involved in JuniperMarket. I'll be overseeing all aspects of IMC's buyer outreach efforts — from buyer recruitment and buyer services operations, through to programs for key accounts and buying groups. It is exciting and rewarding because I can leverage my experience as a brick-and-mortar and e-commerce retailer to best position IMC's physical and digital markets to serve retailer needs.

My heart is with housewares — I think there is a lot of opportunity in housewares and much to be done specific to that vertical — but I am looking forward to working with all buyers across the board. Our goal is to make things more efficient everywhere. You can start an order in a showroom and then go back, do your homework and complete your order in your hotel room, or in your office, or whenever you have time.

Some of the best business is done in-person and our digital offerings complement the face-to-face experience. You go to a market three to five times a year. For the rest of the year, the digital component is available anytime and everywhere. Smaller businesses do not necessarily have the resources or the know-how to run or support e-commerce efficiently. We will provide the resources and tools and solutions for people who don't have the time or the resources to do so themselves, so they can stay focused on the core of their business.

I assume your retail expertise will help inform this new role. I feel like I've [earned] two or three MBAs over the past 26 years. There's no substitute for hands-on knowledge and the ability to build a team and businesses. I bring the voice of the buyer to our leadership team at IMC. It's fun and rewarding to carry that voice in this important work. And I can easily relate to the many retailers we have and are engaging in the development of our solutions.

How have you been preparing for January market? Last year was different from all other years. As a retailer, the focus was on who had inventory. In preparing for January market we are making sure we are clear about our current inventory, future needs and are figuring out where the holes are that need to be filled in while some of our long-term vendors are out of supply. We will look to see whether there are new vendors who can provide a similar item if someone doesn't have it. A feature of JuniperMarket I'm very excited about is the ability to share ideas and products easily with my colleagues around the country. We share emails and spreadsheets often but to be able to share an immediate connection for them to follow through and purchase will be much simpler. ■