

Member spotlight – Leonard & Finco Public Relations

Celebrating 20 years
of evolving
communications

By Nancy Jean

The field of communications has evolved in unexpected ways since Charles Leonard and Susan Finco founded their business Leonard and Finco Public Relations 20 years ago. What started out as an entrepreneurial endeavor in January 1992 — initially as a home-based business — today is lauded as the largest public relations firm north of Milwaukee.

Leonard and Finco has a client list that's a bit of a "who's who" not only on the local Northeast Wisconsin scene, but in the Midwest, nationally, and into Canada. "It's a 24/7 communications world and you need to be ready at a moment's notice" — that's the motto upon which the entire business is built. Taking that to heart is what has brought success to this 10-member team that prides itself on the fresh perspective it offers clients in the Twitter-Facebook age.

Finco smiles when she remembers beginning the business at a time when "fax was the big deal." She added, "It's right when cable TV started to be a big deal."

Today Leonard and Finco helps clients of all sizes and types negotiate what Finco calls the "information explosion." Thirty years ago, someone who decided to open a business would buy the land, build a building and get clients. A successful business in 2012 needs to do more and use all the communication tools available to it, she emphasized, doing strategic planning as they consider growth of the business. That includes the successes in its future as well as any crisis management.

Why does a business or nonprofit need to incorporate public relations as



From left to right: Linda Krout, Kristen Paquet, Charlotte Vincent, Charlie Leonard, Susan Finco, Melissa Bowman, Scott Stein, Cole Buerger, Angela Raleigh

an integral part of strategic planning?

The answer is simple, said Finco: "If you don't tell your story, someone else will." A "consistent and persistent plan" is what Leonard and Finco encourages for all of its clients.

Leonard and Finco for years now been based in the comfortable office suite at 1039 W. Mason St., within easy reach of major highways, Finco pointed out. Comfortable also seems to be a good way to describe the Leonard and Finco team. Each client has the services of a two-person team so that clients know someone is always available to them.

In addition, the business is well-known for its participation in the local community. "I've always been active in the community," said Finco, and that's something that is encouraged and celebrated with employees.

Four years ago Leonard and Finco helped

found "A Pair and a Spare: Brown County's Undercover Challenge" which has raised donations in the community of tens of thousands of underwear and socks for individuals in need. (See www.undercoverchallenge.com.) The charitable endeavor addresses the fact that socks and underwear are among the most necessary and least donated items for low-income populations. The project is coordinated by a committee of the Brown County Homeless and Housing Coalition.

Leonard was already working in the public relations field when he and Finco teamed up 20 years ago. A native of Cudahy, by Milwaukee, Finco was known locally for her work on television. About a decade ago Leonard retired from the business, though continues to work with clients.

Reputation has been key to building Leonard and Finco Public Relations. "I still

think word of mouth and referrals are the best way to get business," said Finco. And just why has Leonard and Finco been so successful?

"Your people are essential," she said. "We have a really good group of people that really get along," she said of her team.

A celebration of Leonard and Finco's 20th anniversary will be planned for later in the year.

Here are some other thoughts from Finco:

—People sometimes confuse marketing with public relations. "To me marketing is a very broad umbrella," she said. With public relations, "We're really more part of communicating the brand and who you are." A lot of the firm's initial work with a client is educating people about just how public relations will help build a business.

—Don't remain stagnant. "Public relations has changed drastically in the 20 years," said Finco. Information is disseminated in so many ways now, and that's why it's so important for a business to be willing to adapt to changes in the marketplace. She points to Facebook and Twitter, and their impact.

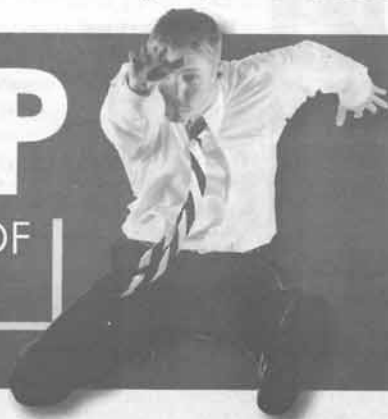
—Like all businesses, Leonard and Finco had to weather the storm of the economic downturn. She said they were able to "hold steady" with some large multi-year projects that had already been planned.

—They are well-known nationally for their public relations work in many fields, especially the energy industry. That started after their work locally with Wisconsin Public Service.

—Being involved in the community is important for anyone in business. Team members at Leonard and Finco can participate in volunteer endeavors during the workday.

—The first organization Leonard and Finco Public Relations ever joined was the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce. Finco eventually served as president of the Chamber board. Chamber membership gives a business the opportunity to network with other businesses, but it also serves as a way to "give back," said Finco.

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