

Silver Linings

By Len Lewis

“We learn from our experiences, and my dad always told me, that you have to make the best decisions you can with the information you have and not look backward - just keep moving forward.”

Over the years, Carol Adams acquired an unusual nickname.

Friends and colleagues took to calling her “three-quarters” – for her rare can-do attitude that guides her personal and professional life, for always seeing the glass as three-quarters full, and for an energy and commitment that keeps her moving full-speed ahead.

“We learn from our experiences, and my dad always told me, that you have to make the best decisions you can with the information you have and not look backward – just keep moving forward,” said the 30-year veteran of Vons and this year’s recipient of the \$10,000 CGA Educational Foundation Legends of the Industry scholarship.

Adams, a department specialist at the divisional office in Fullerton, Calif., has been moving in that direction since 1990 when she joined Vons as a 19-year-old part-time courtesy clerk and moved up to file maintenance clerk within six months.

Adams grew up in a large family and endured challenges and hardships. Despite some adversities, she graduated early from high school with honors. In 1989, Adams attended junior college part time but was forced to drop out and look for a full-time job to support herself.

But, what might have looked like a gray cloudy time in her life held silver linings for Adams. In addition to meeting her husband

of 26 years, her career path at Vons offered the flexibility to work full time and still have time to raise a family and be active in their lives.

“The industry and the company always worked with me when I was raising my children. This enabled me to be involved in community and family activities. The company was very supportive of creating that work/life balance that made me better in my job and in my personal life,” she said.

Over the years, Adams has had a front row seat to the rapid-fire changes that have taken place in retailing. But the opportunity for a fast-paced career is exactly the kind of rush she likes.

“Working in the grocery industry keeps you on your toes and your mind sharp because you’re always learning something new,” said Adams. “One of my most positive experiences has been the opportunity to strengthen my communication skills with customers and employees. Being able to do that in a clear and concise way has also boosted my self-confidence. I’ve learned to balance the expectation of a quick response with the importance of a well thought out procedure.”

This also gave her the self-confidence to renew a formal education that had been interrupted years earlier.



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Carol Adams and family at her daughter's graduation



Carol Adams received an associate of the month award in 2019.

"In 2016, I felt my children were old enough for me to start focusing on myself again. So, I moved from a front stage to back stage position in the company and in 2019 I decided it was time to further my education," Adams said, noting that her long-term goal is to move into a buyer or assistant sales manager position. I'd really like to influence other people with my knowledge and experience as well as through my example."

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Nonetheless, going back to school at Cal State Fullerton was a huge step for Adams and the CGAEF scholarship came at a time when her confidence was wavering as to whether she made the right decision.

"I'd just finished my first two classes at Cal State Fullerton when COVID-19 struck and had to do virtual learning which took an enormous amount of hours and effort."

Then on May 12, her birthday, she got the call from CGAEF Board of Trustees Chair Jacquie Slobom, Gelson's Markets, and Bruce Frazier of Albertsons, Vons, Pavillions, telling her she was a scholarship recipient.



Legends of the Industry Scholarship

In honor of the CGAEF's past and future Hall of Achievement Inductees, the CGA Educational Foundation established the Legends of the Industry Scholarship in 2018, as part of the newly established Scholarship Endowment. This scholarship is an annual \$10,000 scholarship, funded in perpetuity, awarded to one applicant who is pursuing a career in the grocery and/or grocery-related manufacturing industries.

To learn more about the Legends of the Industry Scholarship, visit www.cgaef.org/college-scholarships/scholarship-endowment/

"I assumed it was for \$1,000," Adams recalls. "When they told me it was the Legends of Industry scholarship I got so emotional. Choosing me meant they had confidence in my ability to finish my education and gave me the boost I needed to know that I'd made

the right decision. I feel I've been blessed with the support I've received not only financially, but from friends and family."

The funny thing in all this is that Adams and her son were actually attending the same college at the same time, while her youngest daughter was giving her constant reinforcement that she could do it and her husband alleviated some of the pressures on her by doing more of the cooking and laundry.

But, the pandemic has also had an impact on her quest for a degree in business administration. When Cal State Fullerton decided to continue with virtual sessions, Adams decided it would be best to invest in a school that already had a solid foundation in online schooling. "I have transferred to California Coastal University in Santa Ana which is strictly online. I felt that switching to a college that was already established online was best."

Right now, it seems that Adams has achieved the perfect balance between her work and home life. "My kids are grown and don't have to rely on me the way they used to so I'm able to spend more time focusing on school and career without jeopardizing family life."

As noted, Adams is looking into the future for buyer or other positions that could lead her to an assistant sales manager post. As she put it: "When an opportunity comes up you just have to jump at it." ■