"I think Saks is one of the greatest franchises around now because of its ability to combine traditional with contemporary. It's like a marvelous house that's modern on the outside, but has some great traditional antique rooms. Saks can do this because they have always had people who understood who their customer was and reminded those who came in who Saks was in business for.

"I started at Saks as a salesgirl in my senior year of high school and I worked there for three summers starting in 1954. I basically grew up with Saks, from going there as a child to becoming a summer sales girl selling men's pajamas, then becoming a member of the College Shop. I got to walk around in Bermuda shorts and knee socks and advise college girls on what to bring to college. It was great.

"After ten years at Glamour, I opened up my own consulting business. Saks was one of my clients. Allan Johnson hired me as a consultant to help Saks build a contemporary image for their young seventh floor. Then, in 1974, Allan and Norman Wechsler asked me if I wanted to be fashion director.

"Saks, as I remember it then, was a terrific small store with a great deal of team spirit, which was fostered by Allan Johnson. He knew everybody's first name throughout the store. It was a family store. It had a family spirit. We all worked in one building. We were all on the same floor.

"My role, since they had never had a real fashion office, was to develop one. Gradually, between Allan and everybody else, they helped me create a fashion office with coordinators for every classification. With the support of the merchants, Doris Shaw and her ad department, and Helen O'Hagan in publicity and special events, we developed a growing business.

"When Bob Suslow came in, he wanted an even stronger fashion office to support his plan for developing moderate as well as better business. He required a fashion office that could identify the trends, new products for development and the resources needed to target this expanded customer base. He helped me become a stronger person."
"Helen O'Hagan and I were considered 'establishment' people. Every management team that came in respected what we were doing to link Saks to the leadership community -- customers, designers and the press. Saks executives were smart enough to know that even though you wanted to build moderate level business you had to maintain top level connections.

"One of my favorite things to do was to go out very early and interview the movers and shakers in each of the cities we were moving into. Helen and I paved the way for store launch events that focused on the cultural and charitable priorities of the communities Saks was going into.

"Paul LeBlang's demographic theories were generally proven to be true about who Saks customers were and where they could be found.

"Fashion is fashion. There is a sophisticated customer across the United States, not just in New York or Beverly Hills. It's a special taste customer that wants a Saks Fifth Avenue product no matter where they are and expects the same from Saks in their local branches as they do in New York or Chicago."