

## Member Profile

# Diane Parente, AICI CIP

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**I**N THIS SECOND in the series of member profiles on founding members of our chapter, we are honoring **Diane Parente**, AICI CIP, who was instrumental in establishing the national association as well as the San Francisco Bay Area chapter.

Diane is founder and president of IDMI, a consulting firm which works with individuals and businesses on image credibility. A member of the National Speakers Association, Diane has worked with firms such as Ford Motor Company, Merrill Lynch and the Hyatt-Regency Hotels. Diane has written numerous articles for the *Marin Independent Journal* and has been quoted in several magazines including *In Style* and *salon.com*. She authored "Mastering Your Professional Image: Dressing to Enhance Your Credibility, 1995." Diane received the Award of Excellence from the Image Industry Council.

**Q.** Would you please share some memories of how the SFBA Chapter started and your involvement?

**A.** Back in 1980, Jeanie Johnson and I spoke about so many inexperienced image consultants who were hanging up their shingle and ending up with clients who were not happy. We wanted to see some standards for the profession.

I was a personal shopper in retail fashion and she came from an academic background. We met about once a month to go over ideas about how to put together a professional association for the field. Coralyn Lundell, Suzie Woodard and Joan Hales then joined us and we decided to hold meetings in different stores. Saks, Macy's and Liberty House participated and after the meetings, we received great feedback. I was selected to be the first president from 1983-85 and we put together a board of directors. Coralyn and Jeanie were in charge of membership and we soon had 40 qualified members.

Image consultants could come to the meetings once and then had to fill out an application for screening. You had to meet certain criteria. We met every other month at the Metropolitan Club and everyone paid for their own lunch. We always had a good speaker for the meetings. We had attractive cream and purple marketing materials and published a membership directory. We also



published a printed newsletter six times a year. **Alyce Parsons** set up a speakers bureau and Channel 7 interviewed many of our members on TV. We developed a series of audio tapes along the lines of "So you want to be an Image Consultant" which we sold for a nominal cost. We recorded seminars and sold the tapes. At the end of the year, we came out with an \$8,500 profit.

Jeanie then worked with instructors to put together the first accredited program for Image Consultants at Saddleback College in Southern California.

**Q.** What is your perspective on the direction the chapter is taking? Do you have any suggestions?

**A.** The chapters are important, especially when members can meet in small groups and build relationships. I also love it when all members meet a couple of times a year. I have appreciated meetings where we go around and everyone introduces themselves and says what they do and what is happening in their business. That way you can perhaps offer to help each other. We need to know the strengths and weaknesses of the other members to help refer clients to the best person. Let's look at ways to help each other; this would help build the strength of the association.

**Q.** How has your work as an Image Consultant evolved?

**A.** I have a background in art history and have been in retail since I was sixteen years old. I modeled and became a sales associate for bridge sportswear, commentating large and small fashion shows. I worked as the style consultant in a salon with a broad

spectrum of beauty services. I became fascinated with the message behind what you are wearing and was inspired by Edith Head's book where she talked about style and how what you wear feels in your gut. Then John Molloy's "How To Dress For Success."

Ford hired me to do consulting for workbooks and classes at dealerships. I wrote about scarf tying and that got me out doing demos and promoting my book, "Mastering Your Professional Image: Dressing to Enhance Your Credibility." After a collaboration with Alyce Parsons, I trained Macy's personal shoppers and set up a shopping service in Marin County and Walnut Creek. I now work with business owners, sales people and executives and I specialize in wardrobe management and personal shopping, areas where I shine.

**Q.** What are some of your most rewarding experiences as a professional?

**A.** I was hired by a daughter to help her mother who was in the beginning stages of dementia. I had a hairdresser work with the mother and I put together outfits with the accessories in zip-lock bags. Also, I was a part of a surprise gift package arranged by a client's boyfriend. The man had an event planner book a room at the Fairmont Hotel with chocolate strawberries, music, flowers and candlelight. He put together a treasure-box of all the things he loved about her and asked her to marry him. I was the gift of a shopping trip!

**Q.** What advice would you give to new Image Consultants?

**A.** If I were to start over, after a year I would focus on my strengths. You can't be all things to all people. But it takes a lot of time to specialize. Thirty years later, I still feel I am just seeing the tip of the iceberg with new challenges such as the economy and environmental concerns. I would definitely recommend getting retail experience where you will learn how to size up a client quickly and how to analyze styles. You need to identify the time wasters from the women who mean business and get to the point. You need to understand business and finance. We are in business to make money but rates should reflect experience. My business pet peeves are not returning calls within 24 hours and having a kid answer the phone for you. It is really helpful to intern

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