



Rick Roberge of David Kurlan & Associates and Maria Babb of Middlesex Savings Bank share a hug at the 495 Business Expo, as Roberge networked the floor.

Man about town

Handshakes, business cards and good conversation are the tools of the trade for Rick Roberge at trade shows and elsewhere, and he uses them better than most anyone else

By ROD LEE

Networking has replaced cold calling as the preferred way to do business in today's corporate world. And when it comes to networking, few practice the craft with more aplomb, diligence and stamina than Rick Roberge of David Kurlan & Associates Inc. in Westborough.

The "lovable little fuzz ball" that radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh only portends to be, Roberge attends, by his count, between 100 and 150 events a year; home shows, BNI meetings, business expos; sometimes, he says, "four or five a week"—in season.

"The Buzz" first encountered Roberge at the Corridor Nine Area Chamber of Commerce's annual meeting at White Cliffs in Northborough on May 17th, and was impressed with the charm and warmth he exuded while commiserating with acquaintances and colleagues before dinner.

Seeing him in action at the 495 Business Expo at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel a week later served as ratification that Roberge is, as John DiPietro of ABCD (Advanced Business Concepts DiPietro) in Holden, puts it, a networking dynamo.

PEOPLE WHO ARE close to Roberge agree that he is as towering a presence in the Central Massachusetts networking sphere as "the Big Dipper" is in the clear nighttime sky, or Wachusett Mountain is on the horizon at the edge of North County.

"Rick is a master networker!" Maria Babb, Vice President/Commercial Banking Group at Middlesex Savings Bank's office in Hopkinton, says. "It starts with his commitment to be active in every organization he joins (he's everywhere!). Then, he 'works the floor' by connecting people (who) may have a common interest or bond. So he instantly provides value to everyone he meets."

No one is more aware of this than Roberge's employer, Dave Kurlan, who says, "a lot of people network and network well. What sets Rick apart is that he makes sure the connection goes both ways. That's what makes him different. It's not a natural talent...we teach it; in his case, he takes it to another level. He loves it. That's his playing field!"

Roberge's background is in collections but he is now part of

the team at Kurlan's high-powered sales-development firm. "I'm mostly a coach," he says. "Bring me a problem and we'll work on it." The two men met years ago when both worked for Cutco Knives, and Roberge says he knew then that "I'd found my mentor" in Kurlan. "Dave Kurlan & Associates is one of the most recognized sales-development organizations in the country and in this area they are it," Roberge says.

Whether he is conversing with Amanda Scribner and Debra Ryan of The Homesteader at the 495 Business Expo as was the case on May 24th or weaving his way through forty booths at a world-trade exposition at Bryant University the day before ("I paid \$125.00 to be there with 625 other people," he says), Roberge is constantly reaching out to others.

"I want to do what I do belly-to-belly," he says. This is a staple of his strategy: eye-to-eye, face-to-face contact. Another is, "It's more important to be interested than interesting," he says. "When I meet someone new, I want to know what they need...I make it all about them. If they ask me, 'do you have a business card?' I ask, 'do you want to trade?' because even if they don't call me, I will call them. If your business card is in my hand, I have to call you."

OFTEN AFTER networking with someone for a few minutes, Roberge says, in revealing a further gambit he employs, "I'll go to 'perfect.'" Sounds like things are perfect, "I'll say. "No, not really," they'll respond. This opens a whole new path of dialogue to pursue.

"Rick is a very personal guy and a very nice guy," G. Michael

"Mike" Papaz of Papaz Financial Services, whose office is the same building as Roberge's, says. "That's the key to his success. He says very little. He's a good listener and he asks a lot of good questions and pretty soon people are telling him their life story."

Marvin S. Silver, P.C. of Seder & Chandler, who operates out of offices in Worcester and Westborough, and who knows Roberge principally through the Ambassadors committee that Silver chairs for the Corridor Nine Area Chamber of Commerce, says, "Rick is a good Ambassador and a good coach of Ambassadors."

Roberge says much of the success he's achieved can be attributed to advice and guidance he's received from business people like Dave Kurlan and Steve Groccia. Groccia is senior vice president of commercial lending for Bay State Savings Bank. He has known Roberge since their children were in soccer together, got him involved for a time with the Wachusett-area Rotary Club and referred accounts of his to Roberge for collection. "All I heard back about Rick was favorable" in regard to Roberge's tenacious but fair-minded style, Groccia says.

Roberge in return is grateful for the encouragement Groccia has given him. "He gave me business cards of clients of his who turned out to be clients of mine," Roberge says. "I asked Steve, 'How can I help you in return?' He said, 'take good care of my clients.'"



A NEW ROCKY'S IN TOWN. Frank Chiera, left, Director of Marketing for Rocky's Ace Hardware, and Joseph Giorgio, store manager, greeted patrons who dropped by for the grand opening of the company's newest store (its 27th), on West Boylston St. in West Boylston, on May 10th. Hot dogs, live radio coverage and balloons were all part of the hoopla surrounding launch. Founded as a neighborhood mom-and-pop hardware store in downtown Springfield by Rocco J. "Rocky" Falcone in 1926, Rocky's still stresses customer service and product quality. Rocky Falcone's son James succeeded his father as head of the company in 1966 and personally spearheaded a new wave of growth, taking the operation from a single-store venture into a seven-store chain. James Falcone also led the business into a national affiliation with ACE Co-op. James's son Rocco II represents a third generation of the family that is involved with the enterprise, serving as president.

NEVER A CLOUDY DAY. Staff person Leandra Carey, left, and Owner Marie Demma are always eager to help clients of Caribbean Tanning & Cruise Center in Fiske Hill Plaza on Rt. 131 in Sturbridge—one of three such facilities conveniently situated in the area (the others are in Webster and Putnam, Connecticut). Caribbean Tanning's high-pressured beds are complemented by an atmosphere that is warm and inviting. Marie Demma touts Caribbean Tanning's P90, a high-pressure unit with mist, aromatherapy, built-in AC, shoulder tanners and built-in speakers. A second bed, called the Cayenne, is also marvelous, she says. Caribbean Tanning also offers sunless tanning and stand-ups. "It's all about looking good and feeling good and there are so many positive effects to UV rays that people don't know about," Demma says.

