

work-and-play in 1970s different from today's mix

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

Author Laura Ingalls Wilder quoted her father as he took a break from farming to go fishing.

In the 1970s, hosiery executives--mainly owners of small and medium-sized companies--knew how to mix work and play. Golf outings, fish fry events, picnics, and dinner parties brought hundreds together. Suppliers were represented, often as sponsors.

Networking prompted growth. Some small companies became larger companies as business contacts expanded. In 1972, the Catawba Valley Hosiery "Club"

which later emerged into the statewide Carolina Hosiery Assn. was listing 89 hosiery mills on its roster. Many are still around today--Paul Lavitt Mills, Catawba Sox Inc., Catawba Valley Knitting and Finishing, Ruppe Hosiery, Ellis Hosiery Mills, Twin-City Knitting, Moretz Inc. has grown five-fold since those early days.

Playtime was also learning time. Talk on the golf course could include valuable information. Speakers at the dinners helped some develop marketing concepts.

Legislative issues were far off in the background. U.S. Senator Robert Morgan spoke the hosiery executives in Hickory as did N.C. Gov. Jim Hunt during his first term.

"Keep us the good work," they said. Trade issues, OSHA, environmental regulation and the like weren't on the stove, much less the front burner.

Networking was a democratic event. Technicians (fixers) and production supervisors were in the mix at informal summer gatherings. Upper management dominated the events surrounding the biennial exposition and the annual membership meeting.

As early as 1972, mills were beginning to pay attention to fashion. Manufacturers were told that flesh and nude tints will go with



SUMMER OUTINGS—Golf and picnics attracted diverse segments of manufacturers and suppliers.



the "spectator look of dark and white"; dressy colored shades will match kid glazed strap sandals; and very brights in opaques for sport and holiday wear in pantyhose and knee-highs.

Bentley Machinery was promoting three-feed knitting machines for Jacquard hosiery. Speizman Industries Inc. was the Lonati.

Small hosiery companies today which have developed since those earlier years depend on the Hosiery Technology Center for support. Fewer are members of a trade association, having lost the "touchy feely" aspect of relationships.

And it is a different world.



Technologies, the computerization, the globalization, the consolidations and the frustrations have taken a toll on the entrepreneurs of the 1970s, but others have come along to take their place. "They are



PARTY TIME—Family owners turned out for social occasions, including the Catawba Valley Hosiery Exposition and annual meetings.

fast...they are savvy...and they respond quickly," says Hosiery Center Manager Dan St. Louis in describing the new breed of small company owners.

Today there is less time to play. But "dull" doesn't describe the industry leaders of today. They are busy. They are creative. They are resilient.