

G.W. Smith Ladies Take Bite Of The Big Apple

By MYRA THOMPSON
Staff Reporter

It was lady's night out. And my out too, for that matter.

After a whirlwind, one-day trip New York City earlier this month, it took a while for eight women employees of the G.W. Smith and the Smith Mill Works companies to catch their collective breaths.

The plane fare for the New York jaunt was paid for by their employers, in appreciation of their company service. They were so paid for the day, even though they were high-stepping it around the Big Apple, taking in as much as possible in the hours they were there.

Before you accuse anyone of male discrimination, it should be pointed out that G.W. Smith company sends its men employees on company-paid outings as well.

The women's outings are relatively new because up until a few years ago, the building supply company had only two or three women in its hire. Last year, they were treated to a dinner at the New Market Grille in Winston-Salem. But this year, it was on to Jerry and Steve Smith, owners of both companies.

The shopping and sight seeing tour began early — 7:30 A.M. at the regional airport in Greensboro. It ended there at midnight.

those 17 hours, the ladies lunched in as much as they could. Only one, Shirley Phillips, an office worker at Smith Mill Works, had ever before been to New York and that was years ago.

There were two groups. Four of the G.W. Smith ladies went to New York on June 4, with the second group heading up June

18. Both groups met with a 15-member tour group from The Travel Center, also made up of Lexingtonians.

After landing in Newark, N.J., they soon realized they were among many others who were taking advantages of the cheap plane tickets. The ladies recalled how glad they were to have the tour leader to show them around. Others apparently wished they had not ventured up alone.

"People would come up to our tour leader and say, 'how do you get to New York? Where do I catch the bus? What do I do then?'"

The bus took them into New York City for a two-hour tour, with the rest of the afternoon free. The guide gave them two main pointers on how to deal with the city: don't wear jewelry and guard your pocketbooks close against your body.

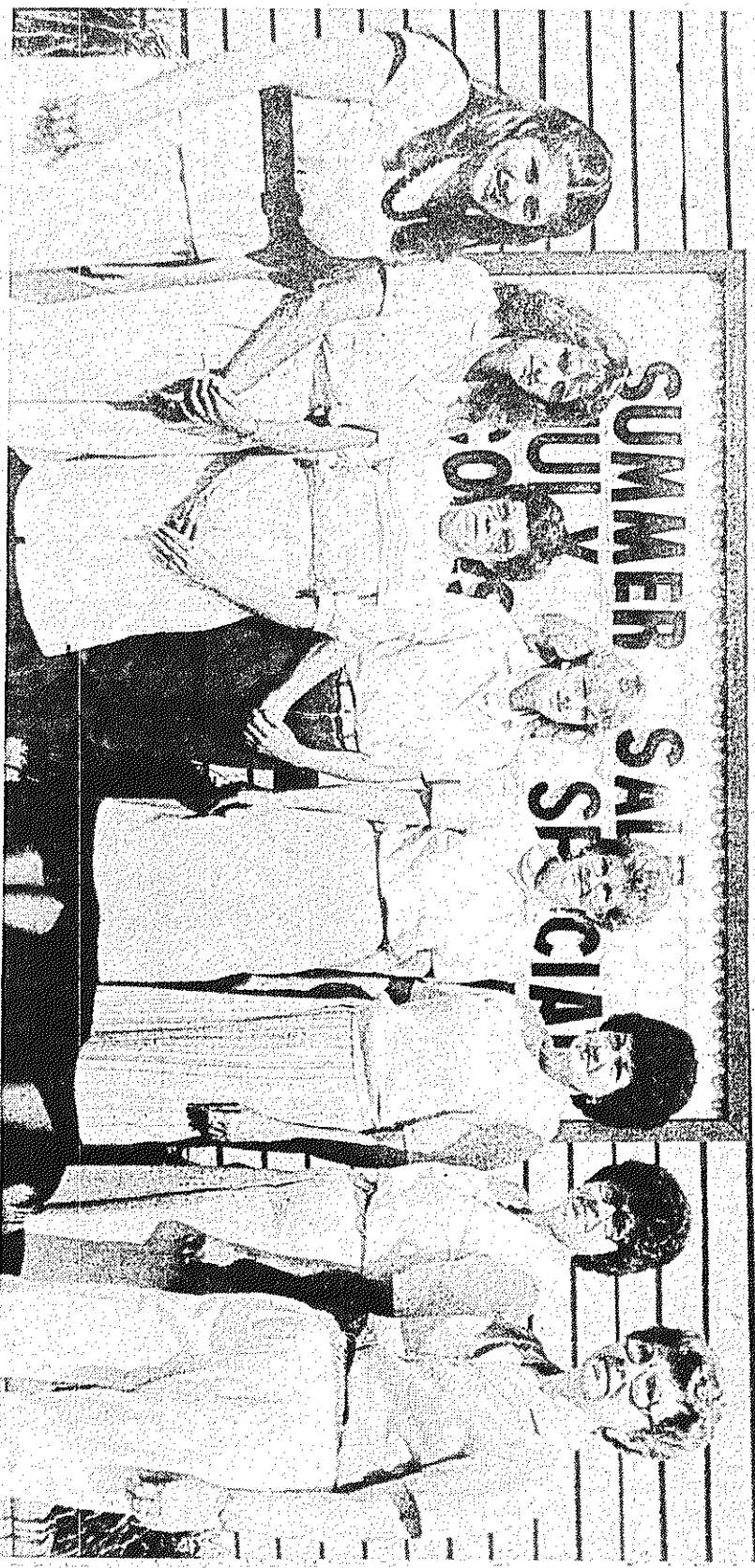
The only "celebrity" they saw was a man from News Center 12 who sat on the airplane with them. Betty Williams, who has been with G.W. Smith's for about 20 years, said one of her initial reactions was surprise at how tall the buildings were and the number of street vendors, offering everything from fresh fruit to hot dogs to soft pretzels.

Mrs. Williams said her husband's first reaction to her trip was negative. "He said 'you don't need to go. What are you going to do, go up there and get mugged?'"

But he became accustomed to the idea, and was glad to hear upon her return that no one was accosted. All eight said they would like to go back when they had more time to spend.

One group ate at a reasonably priced Chinese restaurant. The other ate at Lindy's, where they had heard the stars stop by for an

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These are the ladies who were sent on a company outing to New York last month. They are left to right, Debbie York, Becky Hege, Betty Williams, Lu Anne Leonard, Shirley

Phillips, Jean Buzhardt, Sandra Cannon and Roberta Parsons.

after dinner or an after theatre drink. They heard wrong. They found not one famous person. What they should have been told about the place was it was better known for its inflated prices. Long will they remember their hamburgers at \$8.25 each, and the iced tea, \$2.25 per glass. Coffee was a mere \$1.50.

No one ventured into the wild world of the taxi cab, but they did go underground to the subway, where they rode for about 60

blocks to get to the Staton Island Ferry that took them to see the Statue of Liberty. "I think if I had to, I could manage to get around by myself on the subway," said Debbie York, who works in the office at G.W. Smith and helped coordinate the trip.

She said she figured the bus ride back to the Newark airport had to be just about as hair-raising as a taxi ride. "We were going so fast we about fell off our seats. And when we went through that tunnel, well it was something

else! I was sitting behind the bus driver, and when I said something to him, that made him put his foot down even harder on the gas pedal," she continued.

Jerry Smith said he and his brother Steve came up with the idea to send their women workers on the look-out for something exciting for them to do. When the fares were lowered to \$19.95 for the round-trip flight, that clinched it. He said the outings help build the employer-employ-

Staff Photo by Corey Sink

ee relationship. The women agreed. "It makes you want to come back and want to work a little harder," said Mrs. Williams.

Editor's Note: Other Lexington area people who took a trip to New York recently during the fare wars are welcome to pass on any comments, thoughts or observations. Send them to New York Trip, c/o Myra Thompson, P.O. Box 908, Lexington, N.C. 27292. If enough people respond, some comments may be used in a future story.