

# valley LIFE

Mintz & Hoke  
turns 50

Page 4

School LIFE

Page 26



August 2021

VOLUME 8

EDITION 11

LIFEpublications.com

## Simsbury's Boy of Summer

See story  
on page 21



big  
sky

The #1 gyms in hartford county

Imagine you...  
losing weight &  
feelin' GREAT!



join  
today!

Farmington, CT 06034  
PO Box 725

# Celebrating a golden anniversary

Mintz & Hoke founders leave a successful legacy

By Natalie K. Pollock  
Staff Writer

The Avon-based advertising agency Mintz & Hoke was founded 50 years ago by Joe Hoke and the late Alan Mintz in an unassuming house on Park Road, West Hartford, before moving its offices to Tower Lane in 1974. In an industry where rapid change is a given, the company has continued to persevere and succeed by staying flexible and creative.

According to Kara Mitchell, client service principal. "The core focus of Mintz & Hoke is an intense focus on the client's customers and a rigorous process to uncover unmet and undiscovered needs. It

starts with the founders' mentality."

Alan Mintz retired from the agency in 1989 and died a few years later. Joe Hoke retired in 1998 and sold the agency to the key managers already working there.

"In 1985 when I came in, we were known as the Street Smart agency. We would get out of the office and in the heads and hearts of customers. We encouraged the whole staff to get out of the office. An example project is a medical device that was launched. We talked to surgeons who were being crushed by change to understand how to position the change. For a yogurt company with a different

product, we had people standing in line in a parking lot to sample the product – a powerful commitment," said Andrew Wood, strategy principal and long-time staff member.

Mintz had worked on Madison Avenue as a writer and creative director before returning to Connecticut and partnering with Hoke, an art director at Graceman Advertising in Hartford, according to the company's history. Within two years of founding their own agency, "Mintz & Hoke was known as one of the top creative agencies in Hartford and one of the top three in New England," Hoke was quoted as saying.



Mintz & Hoke members of the senior leadership team comprised of (from left) chief creative officer Sean Crane, strategy principal Andrew Wood, media principal and president of Media Only Sara-Beth Donovan, managing principal and CEO Ron Perine, client service principal Kara Mitchell, and broadcast buying principal Lynette McCarthy gather with retired co-founder Joe Hoke (foreground-center) at their Avon office. Courtesy of Hoke.

**"Our new look and feel reflects the evolution of the Mintz & Hoke brand, with a bold, modern design and retro vibe – the aesthetic [to] complement our immersive philosophy, which has remained consistent since day one."**

– Sean Crane, chief creative officer

Another example of the agency's Street Smart strategy was a campaign for client Aetna Life & Casualty.

"Aetna wanted to reach actuarial students at local colleges, so we went to the colleges. And for Special Olympics Andrew [Wood] became a coach. We immerse ourselves," said Sean Crane, chief creative officer and the newest hirer.

Their Street Smart approach, developed in 1976, was featured in "Adweek," the industry's chief publication and arbiter of quality, effectiveness and creativity. The

strategy has been renamed "Immersively Different" as part of the agency's observance of 50 years in business, together with a new logo, updated website and an overall modernized look to their brand identity.

"Our new look and feel reflects the evolution of the Mintz & Hoke brand, with a bold, modern design and retro vibe – the aesthetic [to] complement our immersive philosophy, which has remained consistent since day one," said Crane.

One of the ad agency's earliest and



Anticipation is **BUILDING**

The Goodrich, Opening 2022

The expansion of The Village at McLean is taking shape, and our 125-acre campus is brimming with excitement.

That's because our Goodrich building will usher in a transformative era of inspired senior living. Imagine waking up every day to striking views of Hop Meadow golf course and enjoying social membership to the country club. And every apartment will reflect the very latest in modern housing design.

A beautiful new look and first-class amenities are only the beginning. Each day will bring opportunities for wellness, including a state-of-the-art fitness center, performing arts theater and gourmet dining.

There's only one thing missing from our active, vibrant community: **you.**

ACT SOON, BECAUSE RESIDENCES ARE BEING RESERVED NOW.



75 Great Pond Road  
Simsbury, CT 06070  
[ExploreMcLean.org](http://ExploreMcLean.org)



most highly visible campaigns: as well as the Connecticut Lottery, leading to television and radio commercials across the state proclaiming, "You can't win if you don't play."

For the now defunct Ames discount stores, they created a fictional persona named Gladys that represented an intrepid discount shopper and was humorous. According to Mitchell, the agency often looks at personifying the product they are advertising, even when the client is in defense and electronics.

"We added real patient stories to the medical device campaign," she said.

Most recently, Mintz & Hoke has been tasked with increasing public response to the "See Something? Say Something" message that has been visible in transportation areas. Their research showed that most commuters recognized the slogan, but not many were contacting authorities with information.

The agency's teams of behavioral scientists, security experts, criminal psychologists and academics to better understand the barriers to action. Their campaign materials were designed to overcome biases and change "how people think about their role in keeping Connecticut safe" by emphasizing that it only takes one person to make a difference.

"We do the research first then have a briefing. All our teams sit down together from the different departments – public relations, digital, website, creative in design and content and media to learn from each other. Then an idea will come to light. It's a cross-functional approach that takes in a lot of viewpoints and disciplines," said Mitchell.

She pointed out that every time they go outside of the office to do their research, they are surprised by what they learn. Sometimes common sense will suggest a direction, but true insight may be missing.

"We are very collaborative with the client. We make sure our strategy and planning works in the real world. And we have a true insight into our customer. I enjoy the ride. I go to work without an answer. There is a problem to be solved and an answer to be found," said Wood.

Mintz & Hoke currently has 31 clients, and many have been with them for many years. They currently employ 45 people and are 100 percent employee-owned.

"Some large brands will have substantial in-house services. They hire us because of what we can do to bring in an outside perspective. We work with the in-house agencies," said Wood.

Their relationship and array of services is different with each client.

"Clients with other agencies or in-house services come to us. We share our process and show them how ours will be different than what others have done. They sometimes say, 'You gave us focus,' not

only with their customers but also internally. We have a better close rate and success and our work is culturally well aligned [with the client]," said Mitchell.

In 1979 Mintz & Hoke added a public relations department, which was unheard of at the time. It was founded and led by Mary Farrell.

"Alan and Joe were visionary and client-oriented. They knew we could be a better partner if we could look at an opportunity and bring the best tools to it. Public relations is a broad category. Our offering was much better if it was included. The more strategy and creative integrate, the greater the whole is than the sum of its parts," said Farrell.

She joined Mintz & Hoke because she shared the partners' thinking that public relations services should be integrated with the other services the agency provided for the client.

"I felt public relations should be an expert partner in people's thinking – a smart part of the client's program. I loved the idea of tapping into additional creative resources," said Farrell.

She hired people who thought creatively, and not that public relations is just another part of the agency.

"PR is somehow tainted if it is with an ad agency. But we had very creative efforts. We were known for great strategy and creativity. We were different," said Farrell.

Clients could readily see why their "sometimes speculative" approach could work well, and she pointed out that many clients believe an outside



In the early days of Mintz & Hoke, co-founders Joe Hoke (left) and the late Alan Mintz brought Mary Farrell, founder of the public relations department, into the ownership group as a partial owner when Mintz retired.

expert can see things differently or more objectively, which also worked in her favor.

"Working with the vice president of communications responsible for advertising and public relations was ideal because they had clout. It's harder if the two functions are separated in a company," she said.

One of her earlier campaigns involved the launching of Edwards Food Warehouse in Connecticut. They were known for low prices and no frills, but what made them different than their competitors was a large selection and national brands. She orchestrated an opening event in Southington.

"We sent out bags of groceries instead of just

press kits to the papers and radio [media], filled with items from national brands. We partnered with a pop radio station for a contest. The winner got a coupon for \$50 or so. It went to the first caller to say: 'at Edwards you will find what you're looking for.' It was a very successful program," said Farrell.

The department swelled to 14 people at its largest size, but averaged 8 to 10 people, most of whom are still working at Mintz & Hoke. Farrell retired in 2018. Her department is still integrated and creative in its own way.

Another successful campaign that she recalled involved the seat belt law enacted in the 1980s.

"We were always research-oriented. We talked to people. People like to resist laws. But people were impressed that they could survive incredible accidents with a seat belt on," she said.

As part of this effort, she staged a press conference in a car junk yard with totaled cars and passed out press kits with smashed cars on the cover and the names of survivors. Many of the survivors spoke at the event.

"We were keen on demonstrations for the media to experience our message," said Farrell.

An English major she worked as a stringer at the Willimantic Chronicle for a few months when a colleague invited her to interview for a position to promote the Connecticut Lottery, where she became acquainted with Mintz & Hoke's work. She was hired and eventually became a partial partner when Mintz & Hoke were still the primary partners. Her husband also worked in the agency's public relations department as a copywriter and account executive. After Mintz retired, she became a primary partner with Hoke and others were elevated to partial partners. After Hoke retired, Farrell



Some of the principals at Mintz & Hoke who were interviewed for this story recall the beginnings of the ad agency and the strategy that served them well over the last 50 years. They are (from left) client service principal Kara Mitchell, strategy principal Andrew Wood, and chief creative officer Sean Crane.

and her husband became primary partners, and other partners took over when the couple retired.

"It's gratifying that the transition happened internally without selling the company, and that it has people that can be trusted so that the agency's values could live on. I always felt it was an ethical company to its employees and clients. I made good money, but it was not all about the money," said Farrell.

There has been a lot of change in the advertis-

ing and public relations world over the last 50 years. But co-founder Joe Hoke's mantra still lives on at his agency: "get out of our offices and into the heads of our clients' customers."

As they contemplate the next 50 years, Mitchell suggested, "There will be challenges around data privacy ahead, so the advertising and marketing industry will become more complex. And there is a more demanding customer now. The needs will evolve." **VL**

See more at <https://www.mintz-hoke.com>.

The latest version of the ad campaign "See Something? Say Something," which Mintz & Hoke was tasked with making more powerful.

Your Community Connection. That's **LIFE**  
For ad sizes and rates call:  
**860.651.4700** or go to [LIFEpublications.com](http://LIFEpublications.com)