

City woman heads up her own PR firm

By ALEXIS SHIELDS

When Ann McRoberts talks about her work in the public relations profession, her eyes light up and her face becomes animated in a serious way.

Her dedication, creativity and intelligence are evident as she speaks of the profession she "just happened into".

Over the 15 or so years she has worked for major companies and has turned it into a career that has put her in touch with some of the outstanding personalities of today.

For her, life itself is a creative energy, as she voraciously pours over books, magazines and newspapers looking for ideas for any of her many clients.

A native of England, she "just happened" into a job as secretary at an advertising agency soon after she landed on the shores of this country with her husband.

"I didn't start out with any career or particular ambition in mind at that time," she said. "Actually my work has moved from secretarial to account executive and on up as a kind of natural progression. I was lucky in that I was in the right place at the right time and did the right things. But my career hasn't been planned out."

But planned or not, she is obviously pleased with the results.

So pleased, in fact, that she has started to work on

her own. And the first thing she did was produce a newspaper-type portfolio detailing her work, which she immediately sent off to friends and media people she has dealt with on a regular basis over the years. The response to this mailing has been "just great" and has given her a number of clients and new campaigns. She had planned to relax during July and August but that has all been changed now as she gears into the full-time study and thought so necessary for her line of work.

She heads into her full-time career as an independent public relations counsel with at least 15 years of experience under her belt. She has worked as public relations director for Sutton Place Hotels Ltd., Bristol Place Hotel, the advertising agency of Goodis, Goldberg Soren Ltd. and MacLaren Advertising.

She has fond memories of the years she worked in the hospitality industry. One of the most cherished is a champagne breakfast for visiting American author Truman Capote.

Based on his own novel Breakfast at Tiffany's, the breakfast consisted of champagne combined with orange juice along with smoked salmon from Nova Scotia. Journalists from local newspapers were invited along to talk with and interview the author, in town to tape a Joyce Davidson TV show.

A great deal of

McRobert's work has centred on the food and drink of the hotel business. However, her interests have also flowered into the fashion world, music and films.

It wasn't boredom that prompted her to get out on her own; just the feeling that "it would be refreshing to launch into my own business". And rather than be offended at her leaving, her former employer, Sutton Place Hotels, insisted on becoming her first client. She now has 11.

McRoberts credits a great deal of her success on hard work and her ability to follow her own instincts.

"I have great faith in my instincts," she said. "They are very seldom wrong and that applies to good as well as bad feelings. For the many years I have been in this business I have tended to follow my own instincts."

But it isn't just instinct that has helped McRoberts. She places great store on priorities, leading with the personal touch, backed up by great attention paid to detail.

"You must plan carefully," she said, talking about the many campaigns she has launched. "You must anticipate that something is going to happen and plan out contingency plans just in case. If you don't do this, you aren't doing the job you are being paid for or giving the best service to your client.

"Another thing, I am a

stickler for detail," she added. "And when I say I will have something, I deliver."

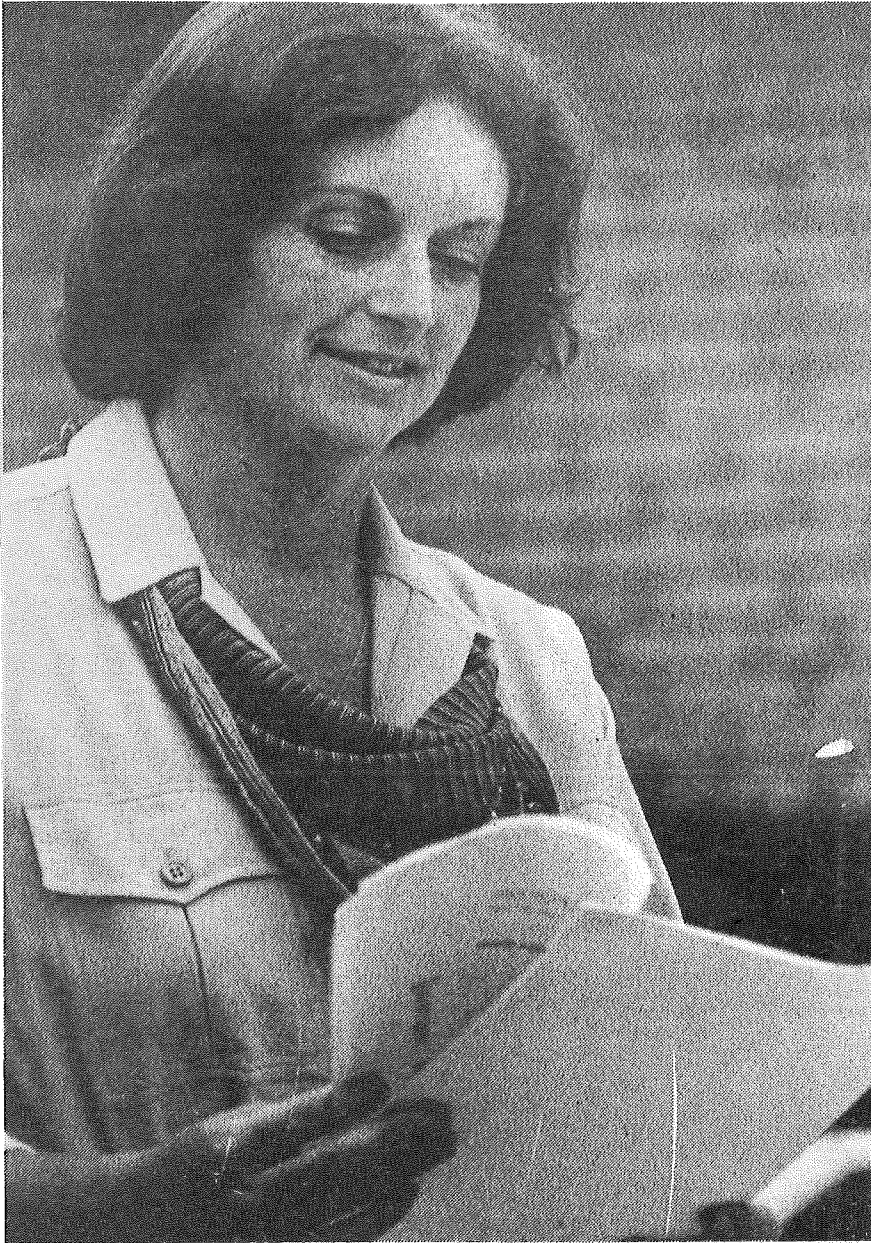
Perhaps one of the secrets of her career is the fact that she doesn't take on a campaign that she doesn't believe in or believes isn't of interest to people.

"I work on projects that I believe in — that is another joy of working for oneself, that of the selection of my own campaigns. And I am very selective."

Even working on her own she will still be able to have fun coming up with new ideas that will fit in easily with the concocting of a 60-pound hamburger, three feet in diameter, complete with its own sesame seed bun and 50 pounds of meat, for European singing star Demio Roussos in April when he stayed at the Sutton Place Hotel in Toronto. That made the front pages of the Toronto Sun, national television and a CITY-TV show hosted by Gene Taylor, who had a hamburger also made up for him as it was his birthday that day.

Young people today certainly don't have the same chance she had when she started, she said.

"Too many students today get out of a university or college and expect to step into the top jobs, getting a salary of \$25,000 right away," she said. "They don't yet know of the great value of experience, which can't be beaten."



Reading is as natural as breathing for Mississauga Ann McRoberts as she pours over yet more material in a constant search for new ideas and presentations.

"They should decide to be the best at whatever they can find, even if it is stuffing envelopes," she said. "There is a great way do do everything, even this. And there are times when everyone must help out and do menial tasks."

Many young people, she claims, don't really know what the public relations profession is all about. "You have to be able to write well, be creative and imaginative, understand the company's relationship to the community and suppliers, as well as the relationships with the media and understand employee relations, administration and management problems.

"Public relations is a misunderstood line of work," she said.

As the interview ends, she mentions that she has to start reading J.R.R. Tolkein's great work Lord of the Rings, and find out all about hobbits. It has something to do with her work, she says. Her imagination is at work, dreaming up symbols to represent the ring and hobbits.