



A career in appliances

Richard Papworth spent almost 40 years at Fisher & Paykel. **Merv Robertson** looks back on an influential career.



RICHARD PAPWORTH – or “Pappy” as he has been known – is Fisher & Paykel through and through. He spent all but one of his 38 years in the appliance industry with F&P. The single year off was spent getting retail experience working for his father Alan, who was an F&P dealer with shops in Warkworth, Wellsford and Helensville.

It all started in January 1964 when Pappy joined F&P as a sales cadet. In 1969 he had his retail affair before applying to rejoin the company. **Roley Gillett** was F&P’s Sales Director at the time and he decided to install Pappy as a sales rep based in New Plymouth, under the watchful eye of **Glynn Jenkins**.

Richard Papworth reflects: “In those days, to become a rep for Fisher & Paykel you had to have the blessing of both **Woolf Fisher** and **Maurice Paykel**, that’s how seriously the position of company representative was taken. They demanded very high standards including an impeccable reputation.”

In due course Papworth took on two territories and covered Hawkes Bay, Horowhenua and the Taranaki. Then in 1977 he was brought back to Auckland to become Marketing Manager for the new Customer Services team in Carbine Road.

During this time, after an incident with a dealer, Papworth developed an idea that would eventually, in 1983, bring about the formation of the Fapay buying group.

He explains: “I was in Kerikeri visiting **Errol Rogers** and Errol was grumpy! He told me he was losing a longstanding family customer because of a ‘bloody iron’. He had sold this iron for the RRP of \$99 and two weeks later the same thing was advertised

in an RTS catalogue for \$79 so the customer believed Rogers was not price competitive and indicated she would shop elsewhere in future.

“[Errol] looked straight at me and said that F&P should be worried about this because if customers thought F&P dealers were unable to match pricing around town, they would shop around and maybe buy other brands of whiteware as well.”

The genesis of FAPAY

This incident struck a chord and Papworth took the warning to heart. After thinking it through and constructing a plan, he went to **Gary Paykel** with his concerns and ideas for an independent buying group, exclusively for Fisher & Paykel dealers. Paykel gave his consent for Richard to research the concept in more depth.

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That took some time but, in 1983, the dream became a reality and Fapay was born, at first, mainly to buy small appliances at prices which enabled members to retail competitively, no matter how small they were.

Says Richard Papworth: “I have to acknowledge the input of the late **Alan Lockie** who was Chairman of Sunbeam and of course back then, Sunbeam was easily the main player in small appliances. Alan saw where I was coming from and thankfully, came on board even though there was some risk that existing chain customers may get upset.

“Next stop was PDL and **Murray Read**. He was poring over his debtor’s ledger when we met and of course several of our dealers were on the list. When I told him that centralised billing would be integral to Fapay and that he would be guaranteed payment in full on the 20th of each month, he had no hesitation in signing up as well.”

From those early days, Fapay grew like topsy and today trades as Appliance Connexion Limited.

Richard Papworth operated F&P’s Customer Services Division for nine years before Gary Paykel and **Don Rowlands** asked him to become General Manager Sales, working out of the Mount Wellington Head Office.

Papworth accepted this challenge and **John Bongard** came in as General Manager Marketing. Bongard went on to set up F&P’s Australian operation and later became CEO. Richard Papworth remained in the GM role for 16 years and had pretty much the same senior team throughout, in particular **Vaughan Simon**, who stepped into the job when he retired at the end of 2001, aged just 55.

Papworth says his major personal career highlight was undoubtedly the formation and success of Fapay. Even today, he looks back with great satisfaction and pride at the way the group flourished and assisted F&P dealers.

In terms of influences on his career, Papworth cites Glynn Jenkins as a “terrific mentor” in the early days and Roley Gillett a “tower of strength”. Latterly, he says “Gary Paykel was simply an outstanding CEO and was very supportive so in three, you have the big personal influences during my career.”

Life after F&P has been pretty busy, but plenty of time has been set aside for a good lifestyle. Richard and Jan have a home in Algies Bay, just out of Warkworth. “Our family had lived in Warkworth for 65 years and after Dad died we were left with several commercial buildings in the main street which were in need of an upgrade and that was a project I was heavily involved in. I also worked extensively on the Warkworth Community Liaison Group which operated in conjunction with the Council and I took a particular interest in roading issues.”

All of which sounds suspiciously like work. What about leisure? “Jan and I travel a lot, on the basis that we may as well while we can because you never know what’s in store later on.”