

# SHELIA SHIPLEY BIDDY

Passion + Compassion = Leadership

## PRESIDENT'S AWARD



One of the industry's most respected executives, Shipley Biddy was the first woman to head a Nashville-based record company as SVP/GM of Decca Records. Her five-year run at Decca followed a decade at MCA Nashville, where she rose through the ranks to SVP/National Promotion working for Bruce Hinton, and an earlier stint at RCA Nashville, where she considered Joe Galante a mentor. She brings a thoughtful, big-picture perspective to every project, and most don't know she is a poet who also has been working on an

autobiography she intends to see published someday. With a career overflowing with leadership and community service achievements, Shipley Biddy today dedicates her estimable experience and business skills as manager of artist management firm Hallmark Direction Co. and President of Stringtown Records.



**I should have died, and almost did**, during a gall bladder operation at 25. I'm a very spiritual person, and my prayer was that if there were something God still wanted me to do, He would let me live. I think that prayer was answered. I look back at this industry and the lives I've influenced, and hopefully not just professionally – people I've counseled about a broken marriage, problems with children and their spirituality. That's what you get when you work with me. It's a full-service friendship.

**I didn't like the record, and didn't think it was a hit.** This was when I was at RCA, and I had called **Barry Mardit**. He asked if I liked this record I was promoting. I'm thinking, "What do I say?" So I said, "Well, you know what? Honestly, I don't. But I hear a lot of things on the radio that I don't personally care for. It's my job to get them exposed to the public and then see if they'll work. So if you were to play it and you got phones on it and it worked, we'd build a story and we'd break the record. If it doesn't work, then I have done my job by trying to get you to give it a chance."

And Barry added it! He said, "I have never had a promotion person be that honest with me. I'm going to put it on and give it a week."

**MCA was looking for a new VP in 1985.**

I was talking to regionals kind of "underground," giving them direction on how to work things. A few months go by and Bruce Hinton walks into my office and says, "Which would you rather do, retail promotion

or radio promotion?" I said, "Definitely radio promotion. I love radio guys, and connect with them." He said, "Then why don't you consider taking this job?" And I said, "You don't want a woman in this position. There's never been one who's ever been successful. The guys will give you a lot of grief for working for a woman. He said, "You don't understand. They *want* you in this job." I said, "All of them?" He said, "Yeah."

**So many young executives** who worked with me have gone to better positions. That's one of the things I'm most proud of. **David Haley, Scott Borchetta, Larry Hughes, Denise Roberts, Rick Baumgartner, John Lytle, Lee Adams, Jimmy Rector**, and there are more. If you were to ask what I looked for in all these people, it's that they *cared*. This was not just a job; this was their *life*.

**I'll promote somebody's else's record** if it's a hit. On conference calls I'd ask the staff, "What are you hearing a buzz on?" Once they started telling me about this **Doug Stone** record, "I'd Be Better Off (In A Pine Box)." I said, "If you hear a great song that deserves to be heard, say good things about it, whether it's yours or somebody else's." About a week passed and [then-Epic executive] **Joe Casey** calls [then-MCA/Nashville President **Jimmy**] **Bowen** and says, "What is Shelia up to?" Bowen says, "What do you mean?" He says, "Her staff is saying stuff about this Doug Stone record. She's up to something!"

**If you're out on the road** and you've got Reba or George, and there's a young act backstage standing by themselves like a deer in the headlights, walk over and see if you can help. I can't tell you how many times I've told regionals that. Introduce them to a radio station. You never know where that act is

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going to be; one day they may come to you, and they'll always remember that kindness.

**Gary Allan and Lee Ann Womack** have to be my most satisfying artist development successes. Bruce, **Mark Wright** and I flew to L.A. to see Gary play. [Curb's] **Dick Whitehouse** was there, and Mark asked me to talk to Gary to keep Dick away from him; he was afraid Dick would offer a deal. So Gary asks, "If I sign with Decca, what would you change about me?" I said, "Why would I want to change you? Labels do too much of that. You'll change yourself through the years as you transition with your music and have success. A label's job is to buy into who you are, and use its talent, expertise and relationships to expose that to the public. I don't want to change anything. I love what I see." He later said that was one of the reasons he signed with us.

With Lee Ann, it was specifically against the thoughts of other people at the label because she was so traditional, but we saw something. I watched her grow so much, and people like Ronnie Dunn and Alan Jackson called to say they loved this girl. To me, the vision for Decca was that it needed to carry the heritage of what it had been before. **Owen Bradley** paid me a high compliment, saying, "If anyone is going to reactivate Decca Records, I'm glad it's you."

**MCA and Decca were the best 15 years of my life.** I never went home before 8pm. The merger was just a business decision that had to be made, and for a number of years it was very difficult to watch the ACM or CMA Awards. I'd cry every time I saw George, Reba, Trisha, Lee Ann or Vince – it was just gut-wrenching to watch because I wasn't part of it anymore.



**Lip Service:** "I worked with Waylon at RCA and he was always so wonderful to me. I used to hold Shooter in my arms and he would grab my chest. Waylon would always say, 'A man after my own heart.' In 1985, I promoted his "Rose In Paradise." It lost its bullet twice, and we still took it to No. 1 – Waylon's first No. 1 single in 10 years." This photo is from the No. 1 party.

**I was overwhelmed** when I was told CRB wanted to present me with the President's Award. It is probably the biggest honor anyone has ever paid me, and came at a point where I really needed it. The last 10 years have been filled with a lot of doubt...you question your worth. But this award is a benchmark for me to say, "Well, I *did* contribute, and there are others outside those who worked with me who know I was involved and tried to further the interests of both radio and records." It is a huge honor. **CAC**



**Rides Of Passage:** MCA's Tony Brown, Bruce Hinton, Scott Borchetta, Shelia and manager Erv Woolsey commemorate the re-signing of George Strait by presenting him with a handsome monogrammed saddle. They also gave him a horse to go with it, delivered later to his ranch in Texas.