

Schmertz Big

THE WESTSIDE TV SHOPPER

FREE
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AND RESTAURANT GUIDE



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Westsider Herbert Schmertz

Head of public relations for Mobil Oil Corporation

by Max Millard

Ever since World War Two, New York City has served as both the corporate capital and the cultural capital of the Western world. Many people see little connection between these dual roles, but in fact, the first has a tremendous impact upon the second. Were all of New York's corporations to withdraw their grants from the city's cultural institutions, few performing artists would be unaffected by the resultant financial squeeze.

Mobil, the nation's fourth largest corporation, has long been a leader in providing funds for the arts. The Mobil-sponsored *Masterpiece Theatre*, with such British-made series as *Upstairs, Downstairs*, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Poldark*, and *I, Claudius*, have made countless thousands of Americans tune in to public television for the first time. In more recent years, Mobil has also sponsored a number of series for American commercial television, such as *Ten Who Dared* and *Between the Wars*. But apart from its contributions to nationwide TV, the Mobil Corporation enriches the cultural life of New Yorkers specifically, through the city's museums and through radio broadcasts.

These facts are related to me by Herbert Schmertz, Mobil's Vice President in charge of public affairs, at his office in the 42-story Mobil Building near Grand Central Station. A sandy haired, elegantly dressed, pleasant mannered executive of 48, he is quite possibly one of the most influential private citizens alive today. The public relations department which he heads is made up of 65 media experts who are responsible not only for planning and overseeing the Mobil-sponsored cultural events, but for writing all of Mobil's editorial comments in newspapers, magazines, and on the air, writing speeches, putting out the annual report and the newsletter, and providing information for the press. Schmertz is, in effect, the chief spokesman for a corporation

that has business interests in more than 100 countries and employs 200,000 people. Combining the qualities of an editor, an administrator, a producer, and a diplomat, he is also a man who loves classical music and theatre, which may explain why he rose to his present position after joining Mobil 13 years ago as a labor relations specialist.

"This season," he begins, "one of our biggest projects is a 13-week presentation on the life of Edward VII (the British monarch who succeeded Victoria). It will be starting on January 17th—Channel 5 in New York, from 8 to 9 p.m.—and will be on probably 100 stations across the country. The series is called *Edward The King*. It was made in England, because the cost is a lot less there.... We first tried to get it on one of the networks, but in their view, the show wouldn't get the kind of audience they want. They're not interested in quality programming. So we're forming our own network for this show, station by station. We call it the non-network network."

Every Tuesday evening from 9:05 to 10:00, Mobil presents a program on WQXR Radio (AM and FM) entitled *The Best of the BBC* which offers recordings of concert music from the archives of the British Broadcasting Corporation, many of them rare. Besides Mobil's customary two-minute editorial statement in the middle of each program, there is a regular feature called *On the Town* by Brendan Gill, drama critic for *New Yorker* magazine, in which Gill tells about some of the city's most worthwhile cultural events.

"We have a very active art and museum program," notes Schmertz, offering me some raisins from a box he takes from a drawer. "We had been constantly approached to sponsor particular shows at museums, but we thought it would be better if we could extend the museums' hours. So now we keep the Whitney and the Guggenheim Museums open late every Tuesday, with free



admission. From September to November the Metropolitan's Temple of Dendur was kept open on Thursday evening because of our grant. Every summer, the Museum of Modern Art has late hours' on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday; there's entertainment in the garden. We also give financial support to the American Museum of Natural History."

Brought up in New Rochelle, Herbert Schmertz has been a Westsider for the past 12 years. In his limited spare time he enjoys playing tennis and sailing. A longtime sports enthusiast, he is listed as creator of the Mobil-sponsored TV anthology about great sports figures from the past, *The Way They Were*. Another series he personally created was *Between The Wars*, which dealt with the failure of international diplomacy between 1919 and 1939.

"Riverside Park is my front yard," he comments. "I run there every morning. I think the West Side is vibrant. It's feisty. I like to watch the refurbishing of buildings on the West Side—particularly on Columbus Avenue. My favorite restaurant is the Museum Cafe (Columbus at 77th). I go there at least once a week."

A stout defender of Mobil's energy policy, Schmertz stresses his corporation's efforts in solar energy, and laments that full development is "many years away." In the meantime, he believes, "coal should be used increasingly. The big impediment is government regulation. Coal is great. There's only two things you can't do with it. You can't mine it and you can't burn it."