

EXECUTIVE SUITE



Valerie Hayes Jester, president of Brandywine Capital Associates

The Right Equipment

Valerie Hayes Jester: Focusing world lessons upon Brandywine Capital Associates

By Bruce E. Mowday

As Valerie Hayes Jester's stint as chair of the national Equipment Leasing and Financing Association was concluding, she planned how to use her newfound free time. She could work with some of her favorite nonprofit organizations, spend time with her family, travel, and concentrate on promoting her growing company, Brandywine Capital Associates Inc. of West Chester.

One shouldn't count on Jester having much free time now that the days of her traveling to Washington for ELFA lobbying duties are over. Jester's made her comment concerning free time as she prepared for a trip to Australia to deliver a business speech.

In late 2007 she handed over her ELFA gavel during a meeting in Orlando, Florida. Jester is looking forward to continuing traveling, but this time she is looking forward to having time to explore the countries she visits rather than being tied to business conventions and sessions where she participates and speaks. Jester recalled one such trip last year to Edinburgh, Scotland, where her dentist husband, Craig Jester, played some of the world's great golf courses while she was occupied with official duties.

Jester is a golfer and tennis player ... "When I get a chance."

While a world traveler, her roots are in Chester County, specifically West Chester. "I grew up four blocks from my office. I'm a real native. It was different time for

the community when I was younger. My father was in real estate for years before the family moved to Florida."

Her home's an old farmhouse in the West Chester area that she and her husband share with their two dogs. "We're dog people."

After completing her studies at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1982 she moved back to the Philadelphia area and began working for a New Jersey company that did fleet car leasing for a number of large companies.

"All I know is that I've been in business a long time. I started in the equipment leasing business, and that is unusual for the industry. Most of the industry's executives seem to have ended up here quite by accident. Many have entered our field through the banking side and have made this industry their chosen career. It has been a bit off the radar screen, but the creative and entrepreneurial aspects of equipment finance and leasing make this an exciting place to be."

Brandywine Capital Associates specializes in equipment leasing and financing services. "Finding innovative solutions to the leasing needs of clients is a key to the success of Brandywine Capital Associates. Our staff has many years' experience in the leasing field, and we know how to structure financing to benefit both the business client and the lending institution."

Valerie Hayes Jester spent time working at General Electric before

starting her own company. She sold it in 1997 to a company based in Houston, Texas, and ran the Pennsylvania office for 4 years. Then she decided once again to start her own business, Brandywine Capital Associates Inc.

Brandywine Capital Associates primarily manages equipment leasing and financing for community banks in the Chester County area and one bank in Utah. "Banks wanting to invest in the industry employ our resources to save on development of their own infrastructure and to piggyback on the resources that are already in place."

Business boomed and the company tripled in size in the last 18 months. "Markets are holding up for us, and the subprime lending problems are not affecting business. We do business locally, and there is a tremendous amount of opportunity in this area. We don't compete with the big guys like GE. The tightening down of credit should help us; it will remove competition in the market place."

The equipment leasing business led to her being elected the first woman chair of the 750-member Equipment Leasing and Finance Association. "Historically, the chairs came from the major companies like GE and Wells Fargo."

During her term, ELFA emphasized programs that fostered professional advancement, developed future leaders, and established a Women in Leasing Initiative. "Some weeks, 100 percent of my time was spent on ELFA, and some weeks

it was 50 percent. It was a year of transition. Our long-time president retired after many successful years of service, and the transition required some special attention and hands-on work in directing the next phase of the ELFA's development. Working with our new president, former congressman Ken Bentsen, was a highlight of the year. I was in Washington a lot. It was very rewarding."

Thoughtfully, Valerie Jester remarked that people involved in the equipment leasing business are different from most bankers since they're more entrepreneurial. "They are very creative people who have to think outside of the box. We need to develop more professionals in our industry. We don't have a pool of young executives, which is why we started the future leaders' conference."

Jester also finds community involvement rewarding: "Networking is very important." She ran the West Chester Charity Ball for a number of years and has served on a number of boards, including the YMCA, Salvation Army, and the Chester County Art Association. On her office wall is a work by Downingtown artist Adrian Martinez, who has done paintings for the Bush White House. "Adrian is a dear friend. My family owns six of his paintings. He is a wonderful person. I grew up Quaker, and I feel the Quaker philosophy in his works."

Jester vows to remain active in her community and profession. A vow she'll undoubtedly keep.