

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile

Judee Metcalfe von Seldeneck '60C

Founder and Chair

Diversified Search

Judee Metcalfe von Seldeneck '60C is Founder and Chair of Diversified Search, the largest female-founded executive search firm in the world (diversifiedsearch.com). As a child, she grew up in High Point, North Carolina, the oldest of three kids raised by Fred and Harriet Curtis ("Happy") Metcalfe. With Southern spunk, a talent for understanding people and business, and a brain to boot, Judee left her Southern roots early on to live a life filled with accomplishments and excitement.

Her experiences traversed the eras of civil rights, Vietnam, the rise of feminism and women's equality, free love, "yuppies," Reaganomics, the influence of pop culture, and everything in between. Raised in a strong Episcopalian family, Judee's journey to become who she was meant to be started with her years at Saint Mary's College.

A Saint Mary's Girl Goes to Washington

Judee, her brother Fred, and sister Incy had an idyllic life in the Metcalfe household. "We went to church for what felt like all day long every Sunday," she says, laughing.

As a self-professed "tomboy," Judee grew up playing football with Fred and his friends, although her grit and sass sometimes got her into trouble. "Often, my mother would come out and make me go inside, because I was too dominating with my brother's friends."

The family lived in High Point until Judee was 15. "Our family knew lots of girls who went to Saint Mary's, and I always knew I'd go, too."

But, her plan fell apart after her father received a promotion as Judee was finishing her high school freshman year. "We had to relocate for his job to Ridgewood, New Jersey. It was the saddest day of my life," she explains. "I'd assumed I'd be at Saint Mary's my last two years of high school and first two years of college, because at the time, women couldn't get into the University of North Carolina until Junior year. So, young women like me would go to Saint Mary's first, and I figured I'd be one of the four-year girls."

Judee's parents had a hard time with the idea of sending her back to North Carolina after moving. There were just too many miles in between. Instead, Judee finished high school in Ridgewood, New Jersey over the next three years.

"After graduation, my mother and father never thought to look at colleges for me. Dad figured I'd become a secretary, like most young women in those days. At the time, the only careers considered appropriate for young women were nursing, teaching, and secretarial positions. He believed I'd go to New York City to the Katie Gibbs School for executive secretaries."

But, some of that Southern sass helped Judee take matters into her own hands.

"As a Southern girl, I'd been taught to listen respectfully, and then I'd go ahead and do what I wanted. So, I said, 'I'm going to Saint Mary's' and that was that."

Judee's memories of her time at 900 Hillsborough Street are filled with laughter, joy, and exploration. She developed lifelong friendships with Betty Copeland Becher '60C (who was also her roommate), Caroline Clark Trask '58HS '60C, Bonnie Stone Adler '58HS '60C, and Pat Exum Bassett '60HS. As a student, she was a "Mu" and was invited to join the Circle, lived in Holt, was one of the founding members of The Cold Cuts, became treasurer of the junior class, was a hall counselor, member of the Young Democrats Club, the Altar Guild, the Stage Coach editorial yearbook staff, the Senior Little Store Committee, the Golf Club (and was an All-Star both years), and she learned to sew in Miss Bason's home economics class.

"I had a blast during my years at Saint Mary's," she says. "At times, I struggled academically, because I was having too much fun with little time for study, but luckily I got through."



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The friendships Judee made while at Saint Mary's have withstood the test of time and distance, "We still travel together, take cruises, and are very close friends to this day. Our spouses are friends which makes it great! Today, these women are the ones I want to spend my time with."

After graduating from Saint Mary's Junior College, Judee transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There, she earned a bachelor's in political science.

"I flunked math twice and got a D in economics, but I was in Chi Omega – the fun sorority, and we took advantage of every moment to enjoy life," she says.

After graduation, most of Judee's sorority sisters left North Carolina for Atlanta "to find husbands and jobs as many did back then." President Kennedy had come into office and it was an exciting time in Washington. Knowing no one, she set out for the political center of our nation.

"It was the era when Kennedy was President, and I was enamored and very excited about that administration," she explains. "So, I decided to go to Washington."

There, Judee rented a house with a few girls and began working as the personal secretary to Walter Mondale. Mondale was a young man from Minnesota who'd been appointed to the U.S. Senate by Governor Karl Rolvaag upon the resignation of Senator Hubert Humphrey – following Humphrey's election as vice president in 1964. Judee stayed in Washington working for Senator Mondale for 10 years, and soaked up everything she could, including learning how to "balance stress, people, and crises, while solving problems at the same time."

Judee grew not only in experience, but also in her own self-confidence during the years with Mondale. "I took away so many lessons, and it was the most incredible time in my life," she says. "This was during Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement. I was at the Lincoln Memorial for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I have a dream' speech, and I walked in the procession for John F. Kennedy's funeral after his assassination. It was a tumultuous time in politics, Washington, and our country."

Yet Judee wasn't satisfied with the status quo. In addition to working for Mondale during her years in D.C., she also started law school in the evenings at American University. "I knew I didn't want to stay in a secretarial role, nor did I want to be a nurse or a teacher. I wanted more."

Judee studied and excelled for the next year and a half, until the demands of her work resulted in her taking a leave of absence.

"The requirement of my day job was that I had to be available to Mondale whenever the Senate was in session, so I couldn't continue," she shares. "I loved everything about law school, but my job and responsibilities had to come first."

From Wife and Mother to Business Mogul

By this time, many of Judee's classmates had already married. "My mother would often go to her bridge games and constantly hear, 'Happy, is Judee engaged yet?' I had boyfriends, but life was so exciting, and I wasn't ready to settle down. It probably drove her nuts."

And then, it happened. Judee met an investment banker from Philadelphia, Clay von Seldeneck, who became her husband. "He was willing to put up with someone like me who wanted to be a wife, mother, *and* have a career. Once we were married, we moved to his native town – Philadelphia."

The move to Philadelphia happened during the peak of the women's movement – a time "when Gloria Steinem was out in front" and a decade after the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

"At the time, women couldn't even obtain a credit card without their spouse's signature," she explains. "After having spent a decade in D.C., and anxious to NOT do the same old thing, but really DO something, I bought into a small, female-owned firm called Distaffers. The business focused on finding temporary and time share jobs for women; a new concept."

By 1974, Judee had bought out her partners, moved into office space in the Western Savings Building at Broad and Chestnut in Philadelphia, and changed the firm's focus to finding full-time, professional jobs for women.

"At first, we had a card table and chairs, and we'd sit there and smoke cigarettes and figure out what to do," she says. "Then, as we finalized our plans for the day, I'd often pop out and head to the golf course."

At the time, the federal government had begun taking its cue from the feminist and civil rights movements. "They wanted to do better at hiring women and minorities," she explains. "This resulted in the government beginning to set aside federal contracts for female and minority-owned businesses. Knowing we could help these companies find qualified women, we told them to tell *us* about the jobs they needed to fill, and we'd find candidates, and they didn't have to pay us a fee. The women paid 10%

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of their first year's salary and had three years to pay it back. We kept our payment records in shoe boxes on 3 x 5 cards."

Judee started out by hiring friends and family, then moved on from there.

"There were a lot of women working in professional careers at the time, but they were doing this in the nonprofit sector. There were very capable women in finance, marketing, administration, and sales and fundraising."

Judee decided to invite ALL of them to lunch, but where?

"In addition to not being able to get a credit card without a husband's signature, women also couldn't belong to private clubs," she explains. "My husband Clay belonged to the Racquet Club, so I contacted the club and made a reservation for 60 people. I didn't tell Clay what I was planning!"

On the designated day, 60 women "descended on that club" for a special luncheon with Judee.

"And, the Racquet Club hasn't been the same since," she says laughing. "Those women who attended became our database in the beginning. Our first placement was a woman marketing researcher; her salary was \$13,000."

Today, Judee's firm places women making in the millions.

"From there, in 1977, we created The Forum of Executive Women, which celebrates 42 years this year. It's a member organization of 450 women 'of significant influence across the Greater Philadelphia region'," she says. "They are women who hold the senior-most positions in corporations, not-for-profit organizations and public sector entities that drive our regional economy and community."

Now, it's one of the top professional women's organizations in the region. (*PR Newswire*)

"Think of it like an old-girls' network in what traditionally is an old boys' network," Judee explains.

Eventually her business expanded beyond placing women, and some very big breaks came – like landing Fidelity Bank as a client early on. Judee's growing firm eventually would be renamed in 1982 as Diversified Search.

Currently, Diversified Search is the largest woman-founded executive search firm in the world. (diversifiedsearch.com) with nine offices in major cities across America and is "part of an elite alliance with offices in over 30 countries (and 60 cities) that identifies and places C-Suite talent around the world" through its global partnership with AltoPartners. Diversified Search's largest sectors are in health care, nonprofit, higher education, life sciences, industrial, and Board of Directors. Most recently, *Forbes* magazine named the firm one of the top seven (out of 250) executive search firms in the U.S. (April 2019).

Not the End of the Story

Over the years, Judee became in high demand for service on Boards of Directors, both for profit and non-profit.

"Often, I was the token woman when Boards were looking to add one," she says. "Back then, by asking questions at the Board meetings, you were considered disruptive. The very first Board I served on was Central National Bank. Because I'd flunked math twice, I couldn't understand the balance sheets and financial reports they were reviewing. The very first meeting, I kept asking question after question. Afterward, the CEO took me aside to have a conversation about the numerous questions I was asking, which were apparently causing the meetings to go much longer. Today, you're not a good Board member if you don't ask questions! But, back in those times that wasn't proper decorum."

Over the years, Judee's service included time on the Board of Directors of National Association of Corporate Directors, Philadelphia Chapter, where she was also Chair; public companies such as Citizens Financial Group, Tasty Baking Company, Teleflex, Inc., CoreStates Financial Group, Meridian Bancorp, and AAA MidAtlantic. In 1998, a large public company approached Judee wanting to purchase the firm.

"I was shocked at the amount they were willing to pay. Who'd have thought that a little Southern girl who counted among her greatest accomplishment learning to sew in Miss Bason's home economics class would see this kind of opportunity?"

And, Judee took the deal.

"I put the money from the sale in AAA tax free municipal bonds, and it sat there," she says. "We became part of a public company for four years, and then determined it wasn't the right strategy or fit for us during a failing market. They were willing to sell it back to us for a third of what they'd paid for it."

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Judee gratefully bought back Diversified Search and threw a big party. “Everyone from the mayor to the governor attended. From there in 2004, we built it to where it is today.”

Most recently, after a private equity firm invested with them, Diversified Search began to actively acquire other executive search firms, and in 2013, Judee assumed the role of Chair. “I announced the appointment of Dale Jones as the new President and CEO. Together, we continue to lead the firm.”

Diversified is one of the fastest growing Executive Search firms in the industry in year-over-year revenue. The firm’s mission is moored in a deeply held belief that great leadership transforms people, organizations, and the world.

Judee also continues serving on Boards and is one of only two women who have served as President of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. Recently, she was named to the Comcast and NBC Universal Joint Diversity Council, Executive Committee of The Committee of Seventy, Committee of 200, and Jefferson Health System’s President’s Leadership Council. Previous Boards include the Global Philadelphia Association, Moyer Foundation, Hyde School (former Chair), the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC Chair), The Caron Foundation, CEO Council for Growth, WHYY, the International Women’s Forum, Zoological Society, BLOCS, Urban Affairs Partnership, the Glaucoma Foundation and Private Sector Outreach Board (as Chair).

She has also received dozens of awards and honors recognizing her achievements both professionally and philanthropically. These include the William Penn Award, the highest honor bestowed by the business community of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce; the Association of Executive Search Consultants’ Eleanor H. Raynolds Award for Excellence in Executive Search; designated as one of *BusinessWeek’s* Top 50 Most Influential Executive Recruiters in the World; and induction into the Philadelphia Business Hall of Fame. She is also a Global Board Member of AltoPartners and received the Paradigm Award and the Trailblazer Award, Philadelphia’s highest business awards for women, and is a founding member of the Committee of 200, comprised of the top businesswomen in the United States.

But, that’s not all. She’s also known in Philadelphia as one of the best dressed professional women in the city. “I get all my clothes sent to me from the Gazebo in Winston-Salem, which is former roommate, Betty Becher’s, boutique. I’ve often had complete strangers come up to me on the street to ask where I got ‘that outfit’ and I tell them!”

Life, Friendship, and Saint Mary’s

Judee and Clay raised two sons while working in Philadelphia and living in Chestnut Hill. Today, their son Kevin lives in Los Angeles as a photographer, while Roddy lives in Philadelphia running his own concierge and gardening business.

“Early on, we hired a live-in housekeeper who was with us for 35 years,” Judee recalls. “The beauty of this decision was that it allowed me to do what I needed to do. We could both have our careers, stay active in our community, serve on Boards, and still spend time quality with the boys.”

Recently, Judee reflected on her personal and professional success. “I think my success is due in part to being born and raised in the South where you learn how to get along with everyone and enjoy life. One finds out there’s a balance to work and enjoying life, and you discover what’s important. I also give great credit to Walter Mondale. Working for a man like him, I watched and learned how to develop and work with people and achieve goals through great teamwork.”

Judee also remains grateful to Saint Mary’s. “For me, it all started at Saint Mary’s, in Holt Hall, as part of the Cold Cuts, the Circle, experiencing the wonderful traditions, and having friendships I have to this day. It is my Saint Mary’s girls who remain my best friends.”

And those sewing lessons in Miss Bason’s class? “Learning to sew saved me whenever I’ve traveled for business or pleasure. If I’ve had to fix a hem that’s unraveled, I can whip it together in no time, thanks to Miss Bason.”

Judee also believes Saint Mary’s is still the whole package because of its historic, Southern traditions, the opportunity to teach girls what’s important in life, to build upon religious foundations and to propel girls academically and socially through experience and exposure to real life.

“Experience is the best teacher,” she says. “For Saint Mary’s to allow girls the safe space to try and fail, make mistakes, and learn from them will help them continue to build resilience. I always say, ‘If you haven’t made many mistakes, then what have you really learned?’ Saint Mary’s has the opportunity to continue to make a real impact on future generations of young women, and I hope today’s Saint Mary’s girls realize how lucky they are to be there and to be themselves.”

Saint Mary’s alumnae like Judee graduate with the skills, knowledge, and integrity they need for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising their families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are agents for positive change in their communities and the world. Judee’s story demonstrates the power Saint Mary’s women have to change their lives and thrive in their professions. She also certainly embodies the spirit of Saint Mary’s women who are educated to make a difference and who will help propel Saint Mary’s forward into the future.