
by Stephen Trefts, President

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS—

REFLECTIONS ON GROWING UP

It seems like it was only yesterday when I was casting the vision for the adventure that has become Northwest Trustee & Management Services. After receiving my law degree, I spent 12 years in the trust management field. Therefore, when I announced my plans to make a major career move and start a trust management business, I was secretly hoping for a response of "we know you can do it, Dad" from my young family. I was not overly surprised, however, by their cautious response. Eventually, they warmed up to the idea and I have greatly appreciated their encouragement and support over the years.

Prior to starting the firm, I interviewed numerous attorneys, financial advisors and other professionals who confirmed my sense that there was a need for a more personal approach to professional estate management and guardianship services. There was an underserved market for individuals who wanted friendly, professional, "hands-on" service and a trustee who would relate to them on a personal level. I also found that many clients desired to maintain a relationship with their financial advisors, which was not possible with nearly all other professional trustees.

With the encouragement of my wife and my peers, I started the firm in our basement at the end of 1989. After a few months, we moved to temporary quarters in a real estate office. Before moving in, my daughters helped me clean the office, including removal of dead bugs from the windowsills, which only added to their initial misgivings. A year later we moved to our current location in the North Spokane Financial Center.

What a thrill it was to obtain our first trust in 1990! Many more trusts soon followed. Our earliest trusts involved a retired missionary to Bangladesh, a boy with a love for exotic animals, a girl growing up in a dysfunctional family and trusts to educate young people and protect the elderly. There was never a dull moment!

In the intervening years, our children have grown into young adulthood. Our eldest daughter, Jennifer, will be celebrating her marriage next summer and our middle daughter, Becky, was married last summer. Our youngest daughter, Lisa, graduated from George Fox University last spring. Like our children, the firm has grown up and reached a stage of much-welcomed maturity.

I am thankful for many things. High on the list is our dedicated staff. They are well-trained and capable of working gracefully with the challenging issues that are often faced by our trust beneficiaries. It is also an honor to be recommended by professional advisors. Over the past 15 years we have appreciated their confidence and we have worked hard to retain it. As important as professional staff and advisors are, the key ingredient to our growth has been our satisfied trust beneficiaries and their families. They know we are available and they have a strong sense that we care about them as individuals.

Over the years the adventure has taken a few unexpected turns but I can still say that I love my job! It gives me a great deal of satisfaction to accompany people over the mountain peaks and through the valleys of lives that often include mental, physical, or emotional challenges and often-complex financial situations. It is a joy to serve them on their journey.

Northwest Trustee & Management Services staff (from left to right): Emily Davis, Randi Melancon, Theresa McKinney, Sandy Calbreath, Stephen Trefts, Lavonda Ataide, Carole Trefts, Sharon Carter, Tami Huff.

2004 NEW TRUST HIGHLIGHTS—

Last year we continued our annual multi-million dollar growth. In several instances, individuals chose Northwest Trustee & Management Services to provide more personalized service than they received from their corporate trustees. In one trust the prior trustee was an out-of-state bank managing assets that included real estate in another state. The Spokane co-trustee desired a more responsive, local trustee. Another trust transferred to us because, after several mergers, the corporate trustee was relocated to the southeastern part of the country. The beneficiary selected us because he desired more personal attention.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were trusts in which the former trustee was a little too close to the situation. In these trusts, beneficiaries had grave concerns over family members as trustees. At issue were conflicts of interest and personality clashes. We were called in to play an objective role and bring the trust management up to a professional level.

We appreciate the new business and are growing to accommodate it. To better serve clients, we have expanded and remodeled our offices. We are also nearing the completion of two other projects. Last year we began the process of upgrading and re-writing our trust software. It has been a major undertaking and will be implemented in the first quarter of this year. Additionally, we created a written succession plan in 2003 to assure long-term continuity of trust management. This has been implemented for all of our new trusts and in nearly all of our existing trusts. We expect to complete the project early this year.

THERESA CONROY WED—

Congratulations to Trust Administrator Theresa Conroy who married Adam McKinney last fall. In addition to her work as a trust administrator, Theresa has the lead role in preparing financial statements and investment reviews.

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