

# The Long View: Amid Rapid Change, Long-Term Leadership Has Its Benefits

By SHERRY MAGILL

For much of this past year, the trustees of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund have been engaged in a search for new trustees. The untimely death of trustee Lynn Huntley in late 2015 created a vacancy in the seven-member board. And the looming retirement of trustee Kitty Phillips – the longest-serving of the seven trustees – promised to create another.

As the trustees considered potential candidates, reviewed resumes and conducted interviews, they increasingly realized the gravity of Kitty Phillips' departure. Kitty is a wise woman; she is smart and funny and hard-working and compassionate. In addition, she has been a trustee of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund for more than 30 years.

Let me repeat that: she has been a trustee of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund for *more than 30 years*.

In this term-limited, next-generation world, it is almost unheard of to do anything for more than 30 years.

Yet, Kitty has remained a faithful steward of Mrs. duPont's legacy and the Jessie Ball duPont Fund has benefitted immensely from her unique perspective – what I will call The Long View.

Leroy Davis, chair for the trustees, expressed it thus:

“Kitty Phillips has provided a guiding hand for the Fund for most of its life. She mentored all of the current trustees, and many others who came before us. She understands in a way few do the rich history of the Fund.”

Kitty not only knows the ancient history, she knows the day-to-day history.

She has been there for the Fund's great successes, and for its bad stumbles. And yes, there have been many bad stumbles. Thanks to Kitty, the hard lessons that we learned from those mistakes have not been lost; they are carried forward and inform current decisions. More than once I have heard Kitty tell her fellow trustees, “you know, I remember when we tried that and....”

The Long View also helps us recognize our successes, a process that sometimes takes years. Many projects, even those involving investment of significant dollars, were frustrating in their early years, as people and organizations were slow to adapt or gain expertise. In those years, a short view might have dismissed our efforts as less than successful. But over time, expertise and understanding grow and the work gains traction and the community sees great benefits. It is The Long View that reveals success. Kitty reminds us often to be patient stewards.

Admittedly, not every organization is best-served by having a 30-year trustee. And, certainly, no organization is well-served

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by a panel of leaders who never change. Fresh eyes, fresh voices and fresh ideas are vital to every organization. They keep us sharp, smart and nimble.

Term limits and turnover are good for boards: they help with recruitment and fundraising, they create opportunities for diversity, they drive development of new leaders and they ensure that the same voices do not dominate year after year.

But in our haste to ensure the benefits of change, we should not forget the value of The Long View and the unique individual who brings it. Organizations with a constructive, long-time leader, be it on staff or on the board, should celebrate their good fortune and embrace the wisdom of The Long View.

At the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, we are grateful for Kitty Phillips' Long View, and the many other gifts she has provided through the years. We hope that, among the newly constituted board, another extraordinary perspective is taking root.

*Sherry Magill is president of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.*