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Market-Value Milestone



Arvest Asset Management On Cusp Of \$10B in Assets Under Management

By Paul Gatling

THE ORIGIN OF what is today known as Arvest Asset Management can be traced back to the 1970s.

AAM, headquartered in Lowell, is the wealth management division that is owned by Walton family-owned Arvest Bank of Fayetteville. The bank initially delivered trust services through its individually chartered banks in the 1970s, and by the end of the decade, both Bank of Bentonville and First National Bank & Trust in Rogers each were managing trust assets of about \$3 million.

Three decades later, AAM is on the cusp of a company milestone: \$10 billion in assets under management.

President and CEO Jim King said during a recent interview that as of Sept. 1, AAM was at approximately \$9.2 billion in AUM in its trust, insurance and brokerage businesses. That's an increase of 75 percent in the last six years, which means

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Jim King, president and CEO of Arvest Asset Management, has been the company's top executive since March 2011.

NWABJ Introduces Honorees For First-Ever C-Suite Awards

By Jennifer Joyner

TEN TOP EXECUTIVES from a variety of industries have been chosen by the *Northwest Arkansas Business Journal* to receive recognition through its inaugural C-Suite Awards.

The *Business Journal* launched the C-Suite Awards this year in order to celebrate the achievements of some of the area's most accomplished, well-established leaders in business and nonprofit.

For the past 18 years, the *Business Journal* has honored rising stars in the professional world through its Forty Under 40 program, and it has recognized up-and-comers in their 20s through Fast 15 since 2011. The C-Suite Awards are open to C-level executives of all ages and are aimed toward influential men and women who have already made their mark, but continue to excel in their industries.

These standout leaders have earned the esteem of the peers, employees, friends and community members who nominated them.

Our staff selected honorees based on their top-tier professional accomplishments, effective leadership and contributions to the community. They will be honored at a luncheon on Oct. 13 at the 21C Museum Hotel in downtown Bentonville.

This year's group includes eight chief executive officers, one chief operating officer and one chief information officer, and industries represented include finance, transportation, health care, nonprofit, venture capital and design.

Congratulations to this year's honorees. You can read more about them starting on Page 16.

We hope to make the C-Suite Awards a long-running feature here at the *Business Journal*. Nominations for next year are open now at nwabusinessjournal.com.

Longer Investments Celebrates 30 Years

By Jennifer Joyner

ONE INVESTMENT SEMINAR changed the course of Elaine Longer's career.

Consequently, her three-decade tenure as owner, president and senior portfolio manager of Longer Investments Inc. of Fayetteville has impacted the clients, colleagues and employees with whom she has worked, and many lives have been touched by her deep commitment to community involvement, made possible by her success in the finance industry.

In 1978, however, Longer was on a different career path.

She worked as a medical technologist in Indiana, while husband Dave pursued his Ph.D. at Purdue, also her undergraduate alma mater.

When a friend who dabbled in finance invited her to an event hosted by Merrill Lynch brokers, Longer decided to attend.

Longer viewed the seminar as an opportunity for a girls' night out and to

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Elaine Longer

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feast on free shrimp and wine. But that night she discovered a love for the finance industry that has endured to this day.

“It just clicked,” she said. “My husband always says I know one language — numbers.”

So, in response to the brokers’ musings on assets, dividends and interest, Longer said, “To me, it was like a symphony.”

From there, Longer read every investment-related publication she could find.

Her husband even bought her a subscription to *The Wall Street Journal*, which was not as readily available as it is now, for a Christmas present that year.

“That was a huge investment for us back then, but it paid off,” she said.

In fact, Longer jokes that, if she compounded the return on that investment, she and her husband could give Warren Buffet a run for his money.

Her Registered Investment Advisor firm, which she started on her own in 1985, now manages \$161 million in assets, according to its latest filing with the U.S. Securities & Exchanges Commission, and boasts seven staff members and 89 clients in 11 states.

A Start in Finance

Although Longer’s interest was piqued during that first seminar, she put pursuit of a finance career on hold until her husband finished his Ph.D.

After he graduated in 1980, he accepted a position on the faculty of the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at the University of Arkansas, and the family moved to Fayetteville.

Longer, then a mother of two, enrolled in the UA’s MBA program that fall, and

three years later was hired by First National Bank CEO John Lewis.

Fresh out of graduate school, Longer remembers telling him she wanted to invest money. However, at the time no banks in the region had investment offices, and so Lewis created a position for her: assistant vice president and trust investment officer.

Lewis and the bank’s board of directors embraced Longer’s strong interest in wealth management, sponsoring her bid to become a Chartered Financial Analyst, when there were only a handful in Arkansas at the time, and sending her to Northern Trust seminars in Chicago.

Longer says her stint at the bank, albeit short, stood her in good stead for the rest of her career. She moved on after two years, along with the rest of her team.

Armed with that experience, her MBA, and two-thirds of the way through the CFA program, Longer started her business in 1985.

Longer Investments was originally located on Center Street, above what was then the local A.G. Edwards & Sons office — and the proximity to the fellow advisement firm was not an accident.

It was before the Internet provided easy access to stock information, and A.G. Edwards manager Don Trumbo suggested Longer look for office space above his, so he could share data access by running a wire through his ceiling to a Quotron machine on her desk.

Longer took him up on his offer.

“It would have been quite difficult and very expensive for a small company to install a single quote machine at that time,” Longer said. “Don let us bootleg quotes off his system for many years.”

Growth Period

Longer completed her CFA in 1986 and the following year hired executive administrator and registered paraplanner Kim Cooper, a decision that she believes was a turning point for Longer Investments.

“With the addition of Kim, I was able to focus on the investments and client service, with Kim handling all of the operational, compliance, and personnel duties,” Longer said. “We would not have the firm we have today if Kim had not come in at that early stage and worked with me for 28 years.”

Another turning point was Longer’s purchase in 2001 of the property that currently houses the firm, located at 9 N. West Ave.

Departure from the downtown square meant easier access for clients and also increased visibility, Longer said.

After the move, the firm hit a growth spurt. Its assets under management had increased tenfold from year one by 2005, and Longer Investments did not slow down over the following decade.

Longer believes the key to the firm’s longevity lies in its dedication to ethics and its employees.

“As an employer, I like to say that our most valuable corporate assets walk out the door each evening,” she said. “I’m thankful that I have a team of highly competent and dedicated employees who deliver their talents daily in the service of our clients.”

The whole team, Longer said, puts the clients first.

“I am always aware of and humbled by how much trust it takes to sign that agreement to turn over control of your

life's savings," she said. "We operate on a fully discretionary basis after account origination. That means once the account is established, we conduct trades without calling or running it by the clients.

"We seek to honor that trust daily in all we do," Longer said.

Individuals and trust funds make up more than 70 percent of the firm's assets under management. Other clients include employee benefit plans, nonprofit organizations and corporations.

Longer Investments still manages money for several of its first-year clients. One family has been a client for three generations, she said.

"As a result of this process and of the communication we have with clients, we have been able to weather storms such as the 2008 financial crisis without loss of clients," she said. "The volatility of the markets is discussed at account origination and incorporated into the investment plan at a level that is comfortable for each individual client."

Cycle of Mentorship

Over the years, the Longer Investments team has mentored about 50 UA students through internships, and many of them have gone on to influential positions within the finance industry, Longer said.

She always tells the interns: "We do this because I have people who believed in me before I believed in myself."

For example, support from Lewis and other leaders from First National Bank continued long after she started her own firm.

"That was a real blessing," she said. "I had tremendous and generous mentors when I needed advice, and I needed a lot back then."

She also counts among her key mentors former UA finance professor Robert Kennedy, who allowed her and one other MBA student into his portfolio management class, usually not open to graduate students.

Longer never felt she was at a disadvantage as a female executive in the male-dominated financial services industry, and now half of her staff is female.

"It was only when I began to travel to meetings out of state that I saw the male/female weighting in the industry," she said. "But I have many friends in the business that go back 30-plus years. We still share thoughts, information, and ideas on a daily basis. Friendships last a lifetime, and more than 90 percent of my friends in the business are male.

"I have never felt anything but welcomed and supported by those with whom I've worked and associated in the finance industry," she said.

Community Work

Longer said she experienced a similar reception in the community at large, where she has been active for years in a number of organizations, including the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, for which she served on the board of directors two terms, as vice chairman and as treasurer.

In 1987, she was the second woman to join Fayetteville Rotary.

Longer now serves on the board of the directors for the Washington Regional Medical Center and is a longtime member of the finance committee at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church.

Previously, she served on the Washington Regional Medical Center Foundation board, the Ozark Guidance Center Foundation board of trustees, and was a founding member of the Walton Arts Center Foundation board.

She was the first recipient of Fayetteville's Athena Award in 1992, was named one of five finalists for the 2005 National Small Business Association Advocate of the Year award, and earned the Outstanding Community Service Award by Ozark Guidance Center in 2012.

Longer attributes her success to her parents, "who raised my siblings and me to have respect for authority, a strong work ethic and moral code, and belief in ourselves," she said.

She also credits her husband for his support and also a lot of prayer.

Longer describes her journey as "nothing short of magical," and her fervor for the finance industry never waned throughout the years.

"The markets are always fascinating, and to have a job you love is truly a blessing," she said. "One can never get bored or ever feel that you have all the answers, since the dynamics of the markets are always shifting and challenging.

"I say if you love your work, there's never a bad Monday." ▀