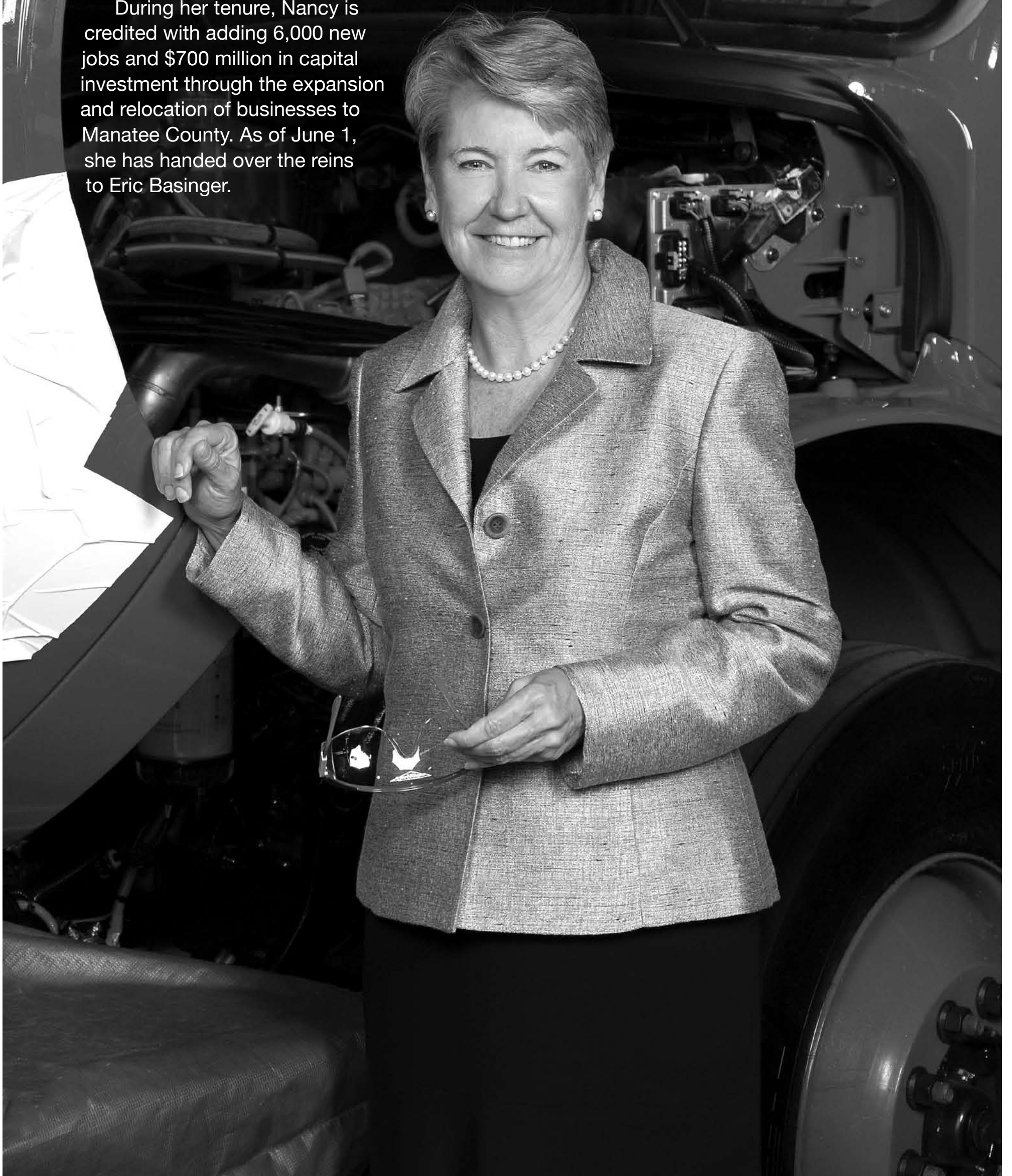


NANCY ENGEL

“It was a matter of being in the right place at the right time,” is how she explains landing the job as Executive Director of the Manatee County Economic Development Council (EDC) some 25 years ago.

During her tenure, Nancy is credited with adding 6,000 new jobs and \$700 million in capital investment through the expansion and relocation of businesses to Manatee County. As of June 1, she has handed over the reins to Eric Basinger.



“It was a matter of being in the right place at the right time,” explains Nancy Engel as she describes how she landed the job as Executive

Director of the Manatee County Economic Development Council (EDC) some 25 years ago. “As a single mother I moved to the area with two small children in tow, took a sales job for a local radio station, then moved on to handle public relations for a phosphate company. When the Manatee County Chamber of Commerce decided to establish an EDC they looked for someone visible in the community who could hold their own in a fiercely competitive arena. Even though I didn’t know what economic development was, they determined that if I could handle the public exposure of a controversial industry, I could probably face the challenges of developing and funding the EDC.”

How right they were. During her tenure, Nancy is credited with adding 6000 new jobs and \$700 million in capital investment through the expansion and relocation of businesses to Manatee County.

Preparing to hand over the reins as executive director, Nancy reflects on how the economic landscape of Manatee County is changing. “Although agriculture remains seasonal, manufacturing is growing, we’re switching from a dependency on real estate related businesses and moving away from retail. With international competition, we need to attract small-to-mid sized companies offering niche services such as medical administration, data mining for specific industries, prototype designers, etc. In addition to becoming more diversified, we need to attract higher paying jobs and offer competitive wages. On average we’re below the state and the nation.”

Although the focus has been on growing existing area industries, Nancy concedes the necessity to be more proactive in targeting jobs requiring higher productivity and skills. She believes this will happen because Manatee County has shown it can focus on the ultimate goals and resolve its differences for the better good by caring less about egos and more about partnerships. This is where the county’s Midwestern U.S. influence shines through.”

A Midwesterner herself, Nancy grew up in Seymore, Indiana, where, “I was raised by parents resembling ‘Ozzie and Harriet’. We lived in a small town and also had a summer cottage on a lake where we swam and fished. For vacations we’d jump into our Rambler, drive 250 miles north of International Falls, Minnesota, then travel 30 miles by canoe to a cabin on a small island in Canada. Mom made our clothes. We were taught basic values.”

These values were what brought Nancy to Manatee County. When she divorced in Indiana, she wanted to be closer to her brother, a Tampa doctor. “But, I didn’t want to be

in his backyard and I also wanted a smaller town.” Looking back, Nancy admits she “wouldn’t have wanted the task of creating an EDC in any other community. This venture has not been about me, but the people who make it happen.”

Making things happen comes naturally to Nancy. “I try to follow a team approach when managing my seven-person staff, but I do have a tendency to charge ahead. When I’m focused, I like to get it done and move on.” Yet, Nancy is proud of her staff, where she has instituted some job sharing. “We have a lot to accomplish by embracing what is bigger than us. We must determine what resources are needed and create the opportunities which will make us a strong player in the region.”

A graduate of Indiana University Nancy, herself, has strong regional presence. She serves on the Suncoast Workforce Board, Enterprise Florida Partners Council, Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport Advisory Commission and the Partners Council of the Tampa Bay Partnership. She has also studied at the Economic Development Institute and participated in Leadership Manatee.

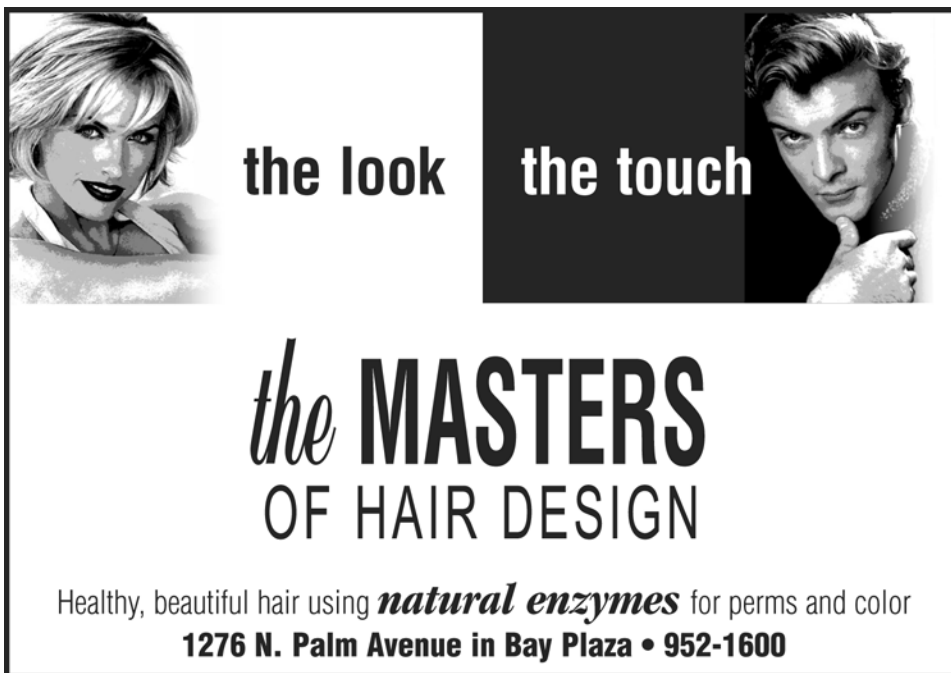
By phasing out of her current career, Nancy is hoping to bring more balance into her life. “I don’t think I did such a good job of that earlier. As a single mom I would have liked to spend more time with my kids rather than being so focused on performing a job to support them.” Her son is now a local fishing guide with a Brazilian wife plus three children, and her daughter is married with three children, one adopted from Viet Nam. Nancy proudly displays their photos along with a drawing by her late mother of one of Nancy’s early fishing catches.

Along with fishing and canoeing, Nancy’s immediate future includes staying for a time with the EDC in the capacity of workforce and business development. Away from the business world she plans to let emotions and creativity take over by indulging her passion for photography of wildlife and, of course, the grandkids. “I want to travel out west as well as take more out of the way trips like my recent outfitters tour of Nicaragua. We’re also preparing our cabin in Canada for the next generation.”

To prepare the newly appointed EDC executive director, Eric Basinger, for duty, Nancy will convey how much Manatee County cares and wants to succeed. “This will happen if you build relationships and concentrate on the basics.”

Her advice to other women: “Don’t be your own worst enemy. We tend to hold ourselves back and put up barriers. Women are usually organized, intuitive, nurturing and good listeners. If you want it badly enough you can do it.”

Story: Virginia Sirocky
Photos: Andrea Hillebrand



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