

# VALLEY Women

The Spirit of the White Mountain Region

WORKBENCH

*Local Women in Business*

MEET THE CHEF  
Women in White

Guest Columnist  
Kimberli Lewis

*Meet the woman behind*  
WHITEHORSE GEAR







# JUDY KENNEDY OF WHITEHORSE GEAR:

*Business owner, motorcycle enthusiast, community volunteer and blossoming pianist*





By Rachael Brown

Judy Kennedy learned to be a “gender blind leader” at an early age in an earlier time. The 1961 graduate of Mount Holyoke College began her career at Little Brown and Company in their newly formed medical division holding positions of senior vice-president, chief administrative officer, corporate secretary and clerk and in 1979 became the first women officer and director of the 150 year-old company.

Today, the Mt. Washington Valley resident co-owns Whitehorse Gear with her husband of more than 50 years, Dan Kennedy. The Kennedys, who met on a blind date and rode on Dan’s 650 BSA motorcycle, will both turn 75 this year and on March 14<sup>th</sup> celebrated 25 years in business together. The motorcycle gear and publishing company is located on the East Conway Road in their 9000 square feet warehouse store with over 8000 motorcycle products in stock.

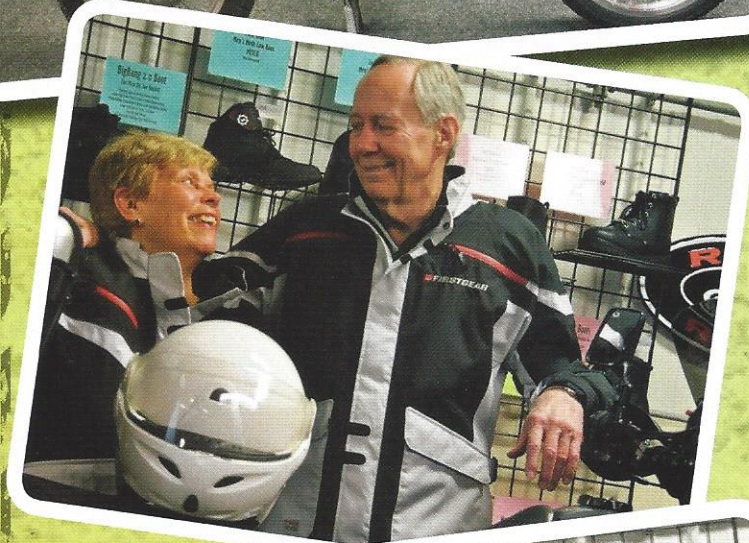
“Our company is a lifestyle business, but one we take very seriously. At the heart of it, I am a business woman who happens to be a motorcyclist, too,” says Kennedy.

Kennedy was on hand to talk with Valley Women.

Valley Women: What were your most important needs getting started in business in the valley?

Judy Kennedy: Reliable Transportation and Infrastructure (UPS, FedEx, USPS, roads, electrical power) so that we could offer quick service to our customers; Dependable Communications (phone lines, internet services) so that our customers and vendors could reach us night and day 365 days/year; and most important of all, talented hard working people who could help us grow our business and their own professional lives. Luckily, we found all three when Dan and I moved our small start-up publishing business to the Valley in 1995, although of the three, slow Internet service was the weak link at first and very frustrating. Now, we only have frequent power surges and outages to complain about.





**VM: What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a female entrepreneur?**

JK: None. As a graduate of Mount Holyoke College, one of the oldest colleges for women in the US, we were trained to be “gender-blind leaders.” Those of us who emerged from that culture, “walked the talk” at home and in our professional lives, confident that the good education and grounding we received at Holyoke would allow us -guarantee us really, since we were all pretty full of ourselves then- to achieve whatever success was most important to us.

**VM: If you knew when you started the business what you know now, would you have done anything differently?**

JK: Dan and I regret that we tried to do too many different things with two few people and resources, which has meant that everyone in our company has had to wear many hats and been spread too thin, with the result that we haven’t done a number of things as well as we would have liked. If we were to do it over, I think we would try to stay more focused. Proper execution is a common dilemma, I think, for entrepreneurs who tend to be highly creative, dream big, and see more opportunities than they can effectively handle.

**VM: What brought you to the White Mountains?**

JK: Truthfully? Watching Jimmy Connors practice relentlessly at five am every morning in the dark on the clay courts of the New England Inn during the Volvo Tennis Tournament! And then, there was that awesome, majestic mountain at the end of Main Street that we simply couldn’t take our eyes off of. To this day, I make a practice of pulling into the Vista



Scenic Overlook north of town every single morning to scan The Conway Daily Sun, commune with the mountain gods for a bit, and thank my lucky stars that I've found home. You'd be surprised at how many others in the Valley do this same thing each morning.

**VM: What are your proudest accomplishments?**

JK: In my first life (before Whitehorse), being appointed the first woman Vice President and member of the Board of Directors of Little, Brown and Company, Boston's prestigious 150 year old book publishing company, where I worked full-time for 34 years before Dan and I moved to the Valley. In this life, taking a chance on the entrepreneurial lifestyle with its risks, responsibilities, and very personal disappointments. You run kind of naked when you move from the cushioned environment of the corporate world to running your own business, where so much is at stake for you and your employees. It's harder than I ever imagined it would be, but it's been very satisfying and a whole lot of fun too.

**VM: What project outside of work consumes most of your time?**

JK: Helping plan and manage Mountain Top Music Center's Community Concert Series. I love music of all kinds and it's been a great joy to work with a group of people who share my passion and want to see quality live performances on a regular basis in our small rural community.

**VM: Do you wish more women would go into business, and if so, what would your advice to them be?**

JK: Gender-blind or not, I do think that on

average many women, maybe not all, bring a certain nurturing quality to business that is different from what has been traditionally practiced. This caring perspective is now much more mainstream than it was 50 years ago, and I think much of the reason for that is the emergence of women at all levels of business, including as leaders and entrepreneurs. But, you can't be caring unless you really care about what you do, so my advice would be for young people to chose a career they feel passionate about, not just one that puts food on the table and a roof over your head, even if it involves taking a big risk.

**VM: What is the best part of living in the Valley, and the hardest part?**

JK: Being part of a small community where personal involvement is necessary for the health of the community and can make a real difference. The hardest part; ice dams.

**VM: What is the most surprising thing about you?**

JK: That I am now learning to play the piano at age 75. Through Mountain Top's program for beginning adult learners, I've been taking weekly piano lessons for the last six months with Executive Director George Wiese, who is Julliard trained, an exacting teacher, and the most patient man I've ever met. Talk about fun!

*For more information visit:*

*[www.whitehorsegear.com](http://www.whitehorsegear.com), call 800-531-1133 or 603-356-6556, stop by 107 East Conway Road, Center Conway*

