

Evelyn Keiser a pioneer in her field — cofounded and grew college system

By Ken Datzman

Globetrotting Evelyn Keiser, an 84-year-old entrepreneur, educator and Temple University medical-technology graduate who owned and operated a laboratory in Philadelphia in the 1950s, has blazed a trail in the field of for-profit higher education in the state of Florida.

Incredibly, starting with only one enrolled student three decades ago, Mrs. Keiser created an institution whose brand is now making inroads in North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. "It has been an interesting journey," said Mrs. Keiser. "Never lose focus of your goal."

At Temple University in Philadelphia, she was one of only a few women in her field of study. She graduated in the university's second medical-technology baccalaureate class, in 1945.

Mrs. Keiser said she was sitting in a chemistry class at Temple with about 200 students the day President Franklin Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan, on Dec. 8, 1941. After the

declaration, the class thinned out "to only a few students" as young men signed up to serve their nation.

She spent the final two years of her program at the Temple University School of Medicine.

Last July, Mrs. Keiser was inducted into the school's "Gallery of Success." It honors Temple alumni who have distinguished themselves in their careers and have inspired others. Her family made the trip to Philadelphia when she was inducted at a luncheon. "It was very exciting for me to go back to campus and be honored this way. It was a wonderful experience," she said.

In 2004, Mrs. Keiser was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Beijing University, citing her "commitment to education articulation agreements" between China and the United States.

The state-approved medical laboratory Mrs. Keiser owned in the East for 12 years was her first taste of entrepreneurship. "Everything was done manually in those days," she says.

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BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Temple University graduate Evelyn Keiser cofounded the Keiser School, now Keiser University, with her son, Dr. Arthur Keiser, in 1977. Starting with one enrolled student, the Keisers went on to build one of Florida's largest independent, regionally accredited universities, which is now making inroads in North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Mrs. Keiser chairs the school's Board of Advisors. She is at the Melbourne campus.

Looking back at first computer — 40 years later

By Charles Burress
Scripps Howard Service

Little did the world realize 40 years ago that a San Francisco stage was featuring the first public glimpse of an invention that would revolutionize not only our daily lives but also our ability to solve the world's problems.

An audience of about 1,000 people had witnessed the premiere of the personal computer. The Dec. 9, 1968, unveiling of the primitive device with a mouse and interactive screen — in a now-legendary demonstration by its inventor, Douglas Engelbart of the Stanford Research Institute — drew a rousing, standing ovation from the computing cognoscenti who recognized the significance of what

they had just seen.

The machine raised hopes of solving a major modern quandary — how to navigate the world's rapidly accumulating and increasingly complex store of information. That year's fledgling efforts to navigate the physical universe in spaceships seemed ponderous and slow compared to the prospect of speeding through the universe of information in the digital ships promised by the new computers.

The invention featured rudimentary windows and hyperlinks that allowed jumping from one document to another, as well as the ability to edit text and add graphics on a video monitor. The presentation also offered a peek at future computer networks that would become the Internet.

"No one has ever before or since seen such a collection of great ideas in one demonstration," said SRI President and CEO Curt Carlson.

The event — dubbed "the mother of all demos" by chroniclers of the computer industry and Silicon Valley — was recently commemorated on its 40th anniversary in a program at Stanford University. The event included Engelbart and some of the other pioneers who worked with him.

The 1968 demonstration was years before anyone dreamed of Microsoft or Apple. "Bill Gates was 12 at the time; Steve Jobs was 13," writes John Naughton in his book "A Brief History of the Future."

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Evelyn Keiser

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As the demands of motherhood increased, she decided to sell the laboratory. In 1963, she moved her family to Florida. Later, Mrs. Keiser helped begin the medical division at the newly opened Fort Lauderdale campus of Charron-Williams College. But it wasn't long before Mrs. Keiser was on the way to building her own organization and returning to her entrepreneurial roots.

While many women her age are well into their retirement years, the energetic Mrs. Keiser, who recently journeyed to Petra, Jordan, arrives early every morning at the career-focused institution she cofounded in 1977, now known as Keiser University. The Fort Lauderdale-based school typically caters to nontraditional students whose average age is 26. This demographic is a sizable, growing market in many regions of the nation.

"I'm probably in my office before anyone else arrives on campus. I like to arrive early and get all of my work done. I don't need much sleep." Mrs. Keiser says she usually makes it to her Fort Lauderdale office at around 5:45 a.m. each day. "I know all the night-maintenance personnel."

She chairs the Keiser University Board of Advisors. Mrs. Keiser stopped teaching medical-technology courses at the school "seven or eight years ago." But she says she has no plans for retirement. "Of course not. I love what I do."

She — along with her son, Dr. Arthur Keiser — pioneered a model of learning and a system that has benefited tens of thousands of students over the past 32 years in Florida, providing them the educational platform to earn degrees, win jobs, and move up in their careers.

They started the private Keiser School, which has grown into Keiser University, a full-fledged institution of higher learning. The university offers associate, bachelor's and master's degrees, and recently received approval for its first doctoral program, which could roll out within a year.

Her long-running, substantial success in filling a niche in higher education sets her apart in an industry where change has not always been readily embraced.

Mrs. Keiser and Dr. Keiser have built their system into one of Florida's largest independent, regionally accredited universities. With its flagship operations in Fort Lauderdale, Keiser University has 13 locations in Florida serving 14,000 students in more than 40 degree programs. Systemwide, the school's enrollment numbers are up, Mrs. Keiser said.

The Melbourne location is Keiser University's second-largest campus, with 1,000 students. It trails Fort Lauderdale, which has an enrollment of 1,400 students. Keiser's Melbourne campus was an upstart venture 20 years ago. "Melbourne was our first expansion (in 1989) and then we opened in 1992 in Tallahassee. When I visit the Melbourne campus, and our other locations around the state, I am proud of what I see. I am proud of the entire organization and all the people who are affiliated with Keiser University."

Keiser University employs about 2,200 people in Florida, she said.

At times, Mrs. Keiser may think it's a fairly tale story — growing a college system from "one student and a single certificate program" to thousands of students today around Florida and new growth potential on tap outside the Sunshine State. "I had a really good partner, my son," she says, referring to Dr. Keiser, who is chancellor of Keiser University. "He happens to have a flair, a vision, for seeing what can be accomplished over the long-term."

Using a business-like approach when starting the Keiser School in Fort Lauderdale, she placed the emphasis squarely on the customer. "The student has always come first in our system," said Mrs. Keiser. "It's been the centerpiece of our success all these years, from the very first student."

Terry Prezzemello was the first student to attend the Keiser School in 1977, Mrs. Keiser said. Now known as Terry Schmidt, she graduated 30 years ago. After a career as a registered nurse and working in corporate sales, Schmidt returned to Keiser to help establish the university's associate in science nursing program. She trains nurses to work in surgical-operating rooms. Keiser runs a perioperative nursing program.

Mrs. Keiser and her son were both studying for their master's degrees at different universities in the late 1970s when they first saw an opportunity as a private-sector provider of education in South Florida serving the health-care segment. They wanted to create an institution where students were more than just a "computer number," and shake up the status quo in higher education. "We thought we could do better by offering more personalized attention."

She wrote the first program, medical assisting, for the Keiser School. The program began as an experiment in for-profit education, using a one-class-at-a-time approach to teaching. "I wrote the first program in a 'wheel' format — in other words, it involved the teaching of only one subject at a time for the term. Everything would be taught in that one subject. Then we could go on to another subject and introduce more students."

The method proved to be a success and with it came growth for the school. The medical-assisting curriculum and a host of other degree programs, many closely tied to the health-care and technology industries, are taught at Keiser University campuses today. The school's nursing program currently serves roughly 1,000 students, making it one of the largest programs of its kind in Florida.

According to a "Community College Week" analysis of U.S. Department of Education data released June 16, 2008, Keiser University was the nationwide leader in production of associate of science graduates in health professionals and related sciences for the third straight year (2006-2008).

The Keiser School name progression from Keiser Institute of Technology (1982) to Keiser College (1986) and Keiser University (2006) reflects a number of milestones, including new degree programs, multiple campus locations, accreditation achievements, and the addition of a graduate school offering master's degrees.

"We turned the corner in the mid-1990s, or maybe a little before then," said Mrs. Keiser. "We have very good people working for Keiser University. Our philosophy has been to recruit people who we think will fit within the Keiser system and who believe in our mission." □



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