

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Shannon Older on the future of the Fort Orange Club

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DONNA ABBOTT-VLAHOS | ALBANY BUSINESS REVIEW

Shannon Older is the first female president of the Fort Orange Club.

By Chelsea Diana

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[Shannon Older](#) first joined the Fort Orange Club in 1995 when she moved back to Albany from Boston in her role with The Dartmouth Co., a commercial real estate firm. Two decades later, Older, in November, was named the first female president of the private club that's been an enclave of power, prestige and social gatherings since 1880.

Over the years, the club's members have included governors, legislators, lobbyists and business executives. Women weren't allowed in until 1988. Older's goal is to attract the next generation to the club.

Tell me about your family's history with the Fort Orange Club. When my father, Dr. Thomas Older, came to Albany to work at Albany Medical Center, the man who was head of the heart surgery group said, "You need to join the Fort Orange Club because it's a good place to meet people." And so he had belonged since I was young. When I moved back here from Boston, he suggested that I join because we were opening the office for The Dartmouth Co. in Albany. I liked the athletic facility, and my husband and I loved the historic aspect of the building, so we both became members in 1995 and they asked me to sit on the membership committee.

What has changed in that time? In 2007, they asked me to run for trustee and I was the first female trustee, so that was definitely a change. I think that overall, from '95 to where we are today, there's been more emphasis on attracting female members.

What are some of the recent changes made to attract new members? We're trying to do more family events. We had one in the fall at a farm that was hay rides and cider doughnuts and all that. We're going to have a children's hot chocolate event where they'll come see the Christmas tree and the children bring a gift that will be donated to the City Rescue Mission. We've had football outings at West Point, things that involve more than just the member. We continually hear from our members that they want to see more opportunities where they can use the facilities for their families. When I was a little girl, you were not allowed to come into the club, until I think it was 16. We don't have that rule anymore.

What about to attract the next generation of members? We transformed a meeting room into a remote workspace room with cubicles that are wired for internet. With so many people remote, they can come in and stay all day. We're looking to be more relevant to the younger generation who has a laptop and maybe comes in to work and then maybe they go work out or they go down and have a drink or they stay for dinner.

It has to be tough running a social club during a pandemic. What changes has the club made in this time? I think for every business, for every family, it's been difficult. We are limited. We have to comply with the CDC guidelines. As soon as we were able to reopen, we've been super vigilant about making sure that all the rules are followed so that the members can feel safe here. Most of our standard events, like the turkey shoot, we can't do this year. Our colonial Christmas parties, we have two of those a year and they're usually both sold out. This year, everyone has to be seated. There's no mingling. We're trying to do lots of member outreach. We offered Thanksgiving to-go this year for the first time. We're trying to get creative that way.

What have been your personal takeaways from 2020? I'm a positive person. This year has dealt us all so many challenges. And if you haven't had them yourself, you know people who have been affected by either Covid directly and through a death, or they've had a relative who they can't see because they're in a hospital or nursing home. We're not a country where people are accustomed to having to deal with restrictions. My daughter is a senior this year and we weren't able to look at colleges. So she's applying to schools that she's never even set foot on the campus. And that's something that I've never imagined that would be a situation. She couldn't take the SATs because her school closed down. I think all we can do is get up every day and put one foot in front of the other and deal with the situation at hand and try to be positive because we will get through this.

What has been a silver lining this year? One of them has been kind of a return to a simpler life more focused on family. With two children, you find yourself going from one

event to the next. As they get older, you find more and more you're kind of running in all different directions. And with all of those things not happening today, it's more family dinner time. It's more everyone's there. You're not running here and there and going away for the weekend and planning a trip. Although that's been uncomfortable for most people, because it's what we were accustomed to, it's resulted in more focus on family here.

Interview has been edited and condensed.

Shannon Older

Title: Partner, The Dartmouth Co.; president, the Fort Orange Club

Age: 54

Grew up: Washington Park neighborhood in Albany

Lives now: Latham

Education: Bachelor's degree from Hamilton College; MBA from NYU's Stern School of Business; J.D. from Suffolk University

Family: Husband, Matthew Amodeo; two children, Eleanor, 18; and Gordon, 16