September 3, 1985

Dr. Edna Saffy, Ph. D.

Dear Dr. Saffy:

I was pleased to read the enclosed article provided by my new associate Clyde M. Collins, Jr., in which you are described as a power consultant.

I look forward to helping you in the Castor campaign.

Sincerely,

COTNEY & COLLINS

HUGH COTNEY

MC/ln
enclosure
Persuasive profile: Tampa's Nancy Ford, godmother of the elitist Athena Society.
Woman Power

Affiliations of Florida's women build new clout

by Mary Ellen Moore and Jeff Dunlap

Jaw set firm; eyes cool and direct; squared shoulders; a self-composed posture of confidence. The profile of power exhibited by judges, lawyers and other managers of authority is the stuff masculine images have been made of since Julius Caesar coined his image in bronze.

As women enter the board rooms and corporate jets of America, a new question arises: What progress for women is really made if only a few of them rise to the top? Is there widespread feminist power beyond an individual woman's personal success?

The answers may be found in the visible new trend called women's "networking"; a concept of organized communication, efficient use of acquaintances and clubbiness similar to what is called the "Good Ole Boy" network. Florida is only too familiar with "Good Ole Boys" — men of position who

Photographs by Pat Canova
Vigor of an aspiring network spreads from Tampa

gather over lunch at private clubs and discuss business and politics, excluding not only women but less successful men from the rarified realm of decision making. Women's clubs are not new, of course, but the emerging web of women's power networking is far different from the garden clubs, museums, fund-raising groups and benevolent Junior League cliques that have typified women's groups up to now.

"To put it bluntly," stated Nancy Ford of Tampa, a co-founder of The Athena Society and The Florida Women's Network (FWN), two potent and growing alliances, "we want to develop statewide clout. At least a mechanism where women could be mobilized statewide." In other words, to create a female network where one phone call or letter could inspire a battery of cooperative, enthusiastic support that would raise money. Negotiate a business deal? Put a female candidate in high office!

"Women," said Ford, "for political reasons, job reasons, PERSONAL reasons, need to know other women throughout the state with similar inclinations. So, we have set up a communication system . . . ."

Some people call Nancy Ford the godmother of woman power in Tampa. She is not a Nancy-Come-Lately to the world of influence, money or patronage; she is either loved, hated, feared or respected. Born in Tampa to a prominent physician, Ford, who described herself as "over 50," attended a private women's college in Virginia, returned to Tampa where she taught school, then quit to rear two children. She dutifully commenced the customary volunteer work that socially prominent women often do: the Junior League, some hospital groups, the symphony and so on. Because of her influence, intelligence and name recognition in the community, she was installed as a vice president of the First National Bank of Florida, her first paying job since teaching. It was then, in 1965, that she began to realize the pervasive value of contacts. Her job was to develop executives' personal bank accounts that would later evolve into more lucrative corporate accounts. "The idea," explained Ford candidly, peering intently through half-spectacles, "was to get in with the leaders of the business community and to woo them. It behooves you to know everyone you can know." During her 10 years of public relations at the bank, the women's movement blossomed nationwide, and Ford "began to meet a new kind of woman: attorneys, physicians, artists, writers . . . ." She also realized that she knew a huge cross section of women who didn't know each other. And, because of their isolation, they did not realize that their interests in feminine issues — from passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the placement of women in executive jobs — were shared by others.

Hence, in 1975, came the carefully plotted formation of The Athena Society, an exclusive collection of well-connected, independent, professional women who named their organization for the Greek goddess of wisdom and the arts. It is a discriminating union
specifically designed to be used by women in the same manner that men, since time immemorial, have used theirs: as a tool of power, prestige and, to a degree, patronage. It makes no claim to egalitarianism.

Athena Society, which stages regular meetings and charges dues, has 87 members; to join, prospective members must be nominated — and approved — by current members, and there are two firm requirements: the prospective member must be actively pro-Equal Rights Amendment and be gainfully employed. To date, the organization includes attorneys, bankers, politicians, business women and educators (not grade school teachers but university women with post-graduate degrees).

An Athena Society roll call would read like an assemblage of Tampa's best-known and most active, powerful women: Pat Frank, state senator; Betty Castor, former Hillsborough County commissioner and state senator, now an administrator at the University of South Florida; Susan Leisner, who earned a master's degree in business administration from New York University and presently sits on Florida's Public Service Commission. By belonging to Athena, these women gain privileged information relevant to career management and community resources. But, they also confront charges of elitism, usually tendered by representatives of other Tampa women's clubs, of which there are many. But then, Athena was conceived to be exclusive, just like certain men's clubs. Its luncheons are held in the 35th floor dining room of downtown Tampa's Tower Club.

"The other networks," noted Ford, stressing that she's not being critical, "are very amorphous. They're like an amoeba that changes shape all the time. People move in and out. As they satisfy their needs, they might move on to something else, only drawing on the network when they need it."

To be sure, there are women's professional organizations that function as career boosters, employment services, political action groups and otherwise, and there are less demanding requirements for membership. Women In Communications, which operates nationwide and in Florida, is one. The Women's Council of Realtors in Miami, the Tallahassee Friday Lunch Bunch (staffed by politicians and government workers) and the Central Florida Educational Consortium for Women are among many others. Some of them may not be amorphous, but the wide variety of interests and locations is indicative of one thing: There is more of a splintered membership and less of a cohesive backbone than some networkers in Florida, including Ford, would like to see. To mend this loose end, Ford, Castor and honchos from other groups formed the Florida Women's Network in 1978. This statewide association, with strongholds in Tampa, Miami-Dade County, Orlando and Jacksonville, functions primarily as a communications and contact agency, albeit a sophisticated one. It publishes a directory that lists a short biography of each member: her educa-
tion, civic and volunteer service, special skills, affiliations, family information and employment record are all there. But, the most important entry in the directory is a list of who each member knows, truly priceless tidbits of information. A Florida Women’s Network member might note that she's a very good friend of a newspaper editor; her cousin works for the Reagan administration; or that she went to school with the governor's wife. The possibilities are endless — and there for the asking.

Last summer, the FWN used its political connections — unsuccessfully — to push for a qualified female appointment to the state Supreme Court. Despite this loss, FWN takes some credit in the appointment of Susan Leisner to the Florida Public Service Commission. (Leisner cannot definitely assert that the fact many network women wrote letters supporting her for the PSC vacancy actually helped get her a lucrative and important job. But who knows?)

If anything, the Florida Women’s Network has fostered stronger ties between women in regional chapters. For example, the Jacksonville Women’s Network is a direct offshoot of the Florida Women's Network. It was co-founded by lawyer and insurance executive Cecelia Bryant (daughter of former Governor Ferris Bryant) and Edna Saffy, a professor of rhetoric at Florida Junior College and self-declared “power consultant.” (Saffy lists “political activist” as an occupation.) The Jacksonville network includes 60 of the city’s top professional women who are required to control a budget and have discretionary membership authority — each professional subgroup has approval over potential candidates of the same profession. Said Saffy, a former president of the Florida Women’s Caucus: “When I was invited to join, political times were changing. You could effect change by being vocal and visible... then that went out of fashion. I saw the need to effect change by being inside (the system). When the network was organized, it seemed like a logical progression for expanding women’s power.”

What Saffy has helped to create — and to a degree has gained — is political power for women, while personally drawing on her network connections to work toward group goals. Saffy, who drives a Mercedes Benz with her own personalized license plate — claims she received her appointment to the Jacksonville Planning Commission as a result of network support. As to charges of elitism, Saffy replies: “It IS elitism, and I accept that. The purpose of the elitism IS to further women who are very high in their professions.”

“I work,” Saffy observed about her network web, “like that Good Ole Boy network — we are neither for just having talked to each other.” Whether that talk is about business, politics or just gossip, the process is close-quarter networking in its most basic form.

But, does women’s networking really work? Are networks the reason Susan Leisner and Edna Saffy were appointed to offices of influence — or are they so eminently qualified and talented that they were headed there anyway? “Who knows what helped,” wondered Nancy Ford, now a consultant to the University of South Florida Medical College. “I haven’t the foggiest notion of whether or not it helped. But, I will tell you this: The network is one of those organizations that knows how things happen, that knows where applications go. So we have those connecting points.” If Ford, Saffy and other network leaders have their way, those connections will grow to be stronger and more influential. This is not to say, however, that networking in Florida is taken seriously all the time.

“Our is sort of a hodgepodge of all the networks,” reported Kathy Cosman, whose home base, Tallahassee, has long been a hotbed of “word-of-mouth” influence. Cosman’s network is not the well-known Tallahassee Women’s Network, also known as the Friday Lunch Bunch. Nor is it the local chapter of the National Organization for Women, always vocal at the capitol.

It’s called The Tallahassee Thursday Night Women’s Drinking Party, and it exists for women “who weren’t really into eating lunch but were into drinking.” In the relaxed, clubby atmosphere of a dimly lighted Tallahassee bar, the group meets and often entertains lobbyists, politicians, business leaders or medical professionals who can discuss problems and progress on a very chummy level.” Good NEW Girls,” some observers are calling them.

The co-author, Mary Ellen Moore, is a Tampa free-lance who has written numerous books, the latest of which is called Women Time.
Their meetings are not always serious business

A wine and cheese reception serves as a "networking" opportunity, as these photographs of Tampa Athena Society members show. (Top) Farm chief Senator Betty Castor (left) chats with Tampa lobbyist Kathy Betancourt. (Center) the University of South Florida's Ann Ross (left) with Cindy Somm, Tampa's director of administration. (Bottom) Lee Lemongood of USF (left) and Dr. Suzanne Nelson of the University of Tampa. (Above) Aleksandra Frye (center), Athena Society president, and college administrator Vickie Van Egooi crack up over a joke.