



Women TO KNOW

Mucho Gusto, Mariá Elba León!

BY JIM RODDEY | PHOTOS BY AIMEE OBIDZINSKI

Former Allegheny County Chief Executive Jim Roddey's series on women in business introduces the senior vice president of Smithfield Trust Company.

Her appearance is impeccable, her Spanish is fluent and her knowledge of investments and estate planning is extensive. María Elba León, senior vice president of Smithfield Trust Company, arrived in Pittsburgh just three years ago and discovered that life in the 'Burgh was much more enjoyable than she would ever have imagined.

Our conversation was a mix of savvy business knowledge and impressive multicultural experiences.

Jim Roddey: How does Pittsburgh compare with some of the many places you've lived?

Mariá Elba León: My husband and I moved from Miami, a place which seems to be in a constant frenzy of "big city rush." Pittsburgh, on the other hand, has all of the advantages of a large metropolitan area plus the serenity of lovely suburbs, beautiful scenery and gracious living. It's the perfect combination for our lifestyle. The high quality of health care and the impressive number of first-class colleges and universities are also important attractions.

JR: What about Pittsburgh surprised you the most?

MEL: I was surprised to find a city that perfectly blends elements of new and old, has wonderful and abundant cultural amenities and, without question, has the most courteous and helpful individuals I had ever encountered.

JR: Your past business experience has been with several giant financial firms. What is the most significant difference as a professional at a much smaller and more intimate company like Smithfield Trust Company?

MEL: While I am certainly proud of my association and accomplishments at a number of high-profile financial institutions, I was thrilled to discover that Smithfield Trust could give me an opportunity to concentrate on a client service ethic not usually found in large organizations. The Smithfield commitment to integrity, high-touch personal and confidential deliverance of services is not only remarkable, but also is rarely found within an industry where size and volume are frequent goals. At Smithfield, we treasure the relationship of mutual respect established between the firm and those we serve.

JR: Would you describe your role at Smithfield?

MEL: My responsibility at Smithfield is not only to tell the story of a highly successful firm, but also to explain the important role performed by a corporate trustee. At Smithfield, it's not necessary for you to be a multimillionaire to receive the quality of service you need and deserve.

JR: Do you believe that southwestern Pennsylvania would benefit from a larger Hispanic population?



MEL: Yes, but only if the employment opportunities are not limited to low-end service positions. In many places where I have lived, cities have benefitted from Hispanic entrepreneurs and the energy and rich culture of a vibrant Hispanic community.

JR: What would you like people to know about you?

MEL: My husband helped me answer this question. He said that people should know that someone born in Sonora, Mexico, with the blood of Spain, France and Opota Indian running through her veins, can come to the U.S. speaking only Spanish and conquer the barriers of language, (being a female and a Hispanic) and reach the highest levels in a very competitive profession.

María Elba has lived and worked in Texas, Arizona, Florida, New Mexico and the Cayman Islands. She was named to the World's Who's Who of Women and as one of the Outstanding Young Women of America, was featured in Women's Magazine and received a presidential appointment to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. She is a wonderful enhancement to the Pittsburgh region. ■