

Barrie Wexner-Wurzburg

with ANNE CUNNINGHAM O'NEILL



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BARRIE WEXNER-WURZBURG is the daughter of Shirley Wexner, owner and CEO of Joseph, the well-known specialty store in Laurelwood Shopping Center famous for its luxury designer goods, including handbags, shoes, jewelry, apparel, and cosmetics.

Wexner-Wurzburg is the president of Joseph, and I sat down with her recently to ask about some of the things she is most passionate about — in addition to Joseph, of course!

Q: Favorite Memphis nonprofits and arts organizations?

We are always looking for ways to help out and get involved in the greater Memphis community, in other words to give back to the community that has supported my family and its businesses for 80 years. Part of the proceeds for many of our special events at the store go to charity. I am on the board of the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, which is an incredible organization and a model for similar groups around the country. ArtsMemphis is invaluable, and I love Playhouse on the Square and Ballet Memphis, which in particular is a great example of how art forms can adapt to the times. Also, the rejuvenation of the Levitt Shell has brought so many young people (as well as people of all ages) to the cultural table.

Q: Have to ask about family since you are in a family business.

My husband, Kenneth Wurzburg, is director of development of Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, which is what he calls his "encore career." He has a great eye, and could have helped out at Joseph, but he is exactly where he needs to be. One of my two daughters, Elle, just moved back from New York City and is working at Joseph, which we are very excited about. Marcy and her family are also moving back to Memphis in June. David is halfway around the world living in Bangkok.

Q: Pets?

Oh yes, I bring our family dog, Ziggy, a Goldendoodle, to work most days. In fact, we have coined a new word in the office, *Zigstastrophe* (n), "a catastrophe involving or caused by Ziggy."

Q: In your free time, what do you like to do and where do you like to travel?

We have a home at Horseshoe Lake, Arkansas, where we spend as much time

as possible and in fact are commuting from there more and more. We entertain a lot in the country, and basically have an open-door policy for friends and family. My husband and I love to sail both at Horseshoe and in the Virgin Islands. Also, I have been a runner since 1975 and have been in lots of marathons. Basically, I like to be outdoors as much as possible.

Q: What music is on your iPod?

There are 9,000 songs on my iPod, mostly things I grew up with — Cat Stevens, Crosby, Stills and Nash, the Beatles, and also some jazz. I don't listen to music when I run because I treasure the peace and quiet.

Q: What are you reading these days?

I love to read and, in fact, have built and set up a "Little Free Library" in front of my house at Horseshoe. This is a small, decorated box which looks almost like a large bird feeder which is there for people to "take a book, return a book." I first heard about this program on NPR, and it was established to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges.

Myself, I enjoy female authors and am reading Donna Tartt's best-selling *The Goldfinch* at the moment and just finished Anna Quindlen's *Still Life with Bread-crumbs*. I like Wally Lamb (he's a man of course), author of *She's Come Undone* and *We Are Water* among others.

Q: Your "go to" restaurant in Memphis?

I love River Oaks, because it has such a warm, homey, and inviting atmosphere, and it is important to support locally owned and operated restaurants. And of course, Jose Gutierrez is such a great chef!

Q: The must-have little luxuries that make you happy?

I love fragrance, and my favorite has been the signature perfume called "T" created for the Japanese department store, Takashimaya. When its New York City store on Fifth Avenue closed, I tracked down the makers of the perfume, and we are going to bring it back in 2015 to Joseph under the name "J." Watch for it!

Q: How would you describe your personal style in dress?

It's an urban style, mostly black, although I love color on other people.

Q: I have to ask about fashion trends for spring.

Separates are big at the moment, as are flowery prints, all lengths of skirts — midi, maxi, and full skirts — shorts, jumpsuits, lace and fringe trim, boots all year round, single sole shoes, i.e. more feminine pumps.

Q: What about exciting, new products we read about such as Sarah Jessica Parker's shoe line and Tory Burch perfumes?

These are restricted to a few large stores at the moment, Nordstrom, for example, but you better believe we are going to be first in line to carry them as soon as we can!

Q: And now, tell me about your mother, Shirley, who I know has inspired you in this business every step of the way. And about your late father, Alfred.

Mother's work ethic and boundless energy are amazing — she's here in the store six days a week. It is her zest for life and her passion for Joseph that make her who she is. And she is really, really fun. Alfred Wexner, my father, was an icon in the shoe industry and as such was well-known throughout the country; he's always a hero and inspiration to me. M

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