

RENO

M A G A Z I N E

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A PASSION FOR CARS LEADS TO
MUSEUM TOP SPOT

CREATIVE CLOSE-UP

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Driven to SUCCESS

JACKIE FRADY DEFTLY NAVIGATES A CHALLENGING ROAD BY KEEPING AN EYE ON THE FINISH LINE



BELLE OF THE ROAD

Jackie Frady is photographed at the stunning Rancharrah estate in south Reno.

Cover

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ACKIE FRADY EMERGES FROM THE MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR HARRAH ESTATE. She is the epitome of grace and sophistication. Hair perfectly coiffed, black floor-length evening gown rippling in the crisp breeze, she approaches a \$3 million 1936 Mercedes-Benz parked alongside a creek on the Rancharrah property. Her expression is giddy, almost schoolgirlish, as if she's meeting up with her childhood crush for some stolen time on a swing set.

But as she reaches the car, her lighthearted demeanor assumes a serious tone. She gazes downward, grabs the billowing dress, and gently pulls it up to reveal the ensemble's pièce de résistance: a pair of sueded leather mules. Simple. Black. Heelless. Stable.

She removes the modest mules and steps into a pair of super-sexy high heels.

"Just another day at the office," she laughs, eyes rolling behind dramatically curled lashes, highlighting the clear juxtaposition between her attire — carefully selected by a personal shopper for her RENO Magazine cover shoot — and her daily wardrobe.

As executive director of the National Automobile Museum, you'll more likely see Frady in a business suit than an evening gown. Or in leather mules than strappy designer heels.

But to the casual onlooker, Frady clearly assumes and embodies the role of Vanity Fair cover girl, draping herself along the sleek lines of the most valuable car in the museum's collection. The devil is in the details, as they say, as only Frady would find herself seducing the car and the camera lens — while ensuring the glittering bracelet adorning her left wrist doesn't scratch the meticulously mirrored surface of the front fender.

"Shall we just switch arms?" she asks.

Mission accomplished and scratch averted, the photo shoot resumes. Reverentially.

Frady is a study in contrasts. Calm yet passionate; warm of spirit yet cool and collected; both engaged and introverted, she is a woman who could easily be seen as both the life of the party and the unobtrusive observer.

Such juxtapositions also characterize her professional life.

⇒ TAKING THE WHEEL ⇒

"I actually began working at Harrah's in 1981 in finance and administration, and I had worked there for six weeks when they asked me to take a temporary assignment with Harrah's Automobile Collection," she recalls of her administrative beginnings.

The timing of her temporary assignment coincided with an announcement that a nonprofit organization would be formed to receive a portion of the world-renowned Harrah's collection of cars.

They asked her for one week; she has given them 30 years — and counting. While her first title was executive secretary to the president, her background in



Dress, Adrianna Papell for
"E! Live" From the Red Carpet
Beaded Gown, courtesy of
Dillard's.

Cover

“
IN THE ERA I GREW UP,
YOUR CAR CLEARLY WAS
A STATEMENT ABOUT
YOUR IDENTITY AND
WHO YOU WERE.”

JACKIE FRADY



Dress, Alex Evenings
and Gianni Bini shoes,
courtesy of Dillard's.

business, experience in destination sales and tourism, as well as passion for cars soon found her rising to the top. She assumed the role of executive director of the Auto Museum in 1992, a decade after joining the organization.

“I was fortunate because I grew up in the Southern California car culture,” she says of her Riverside roots. “In the era I grew up, your car clearly was a statement about your identity and who you were. When I was 16, my new car was a 1969 Pontiac Firebird, chocolate brown with white interior.

“Cars were always on my radar screen.”

Now, the older and wiser Frady drives a silver GMC Envoy; but on weekends, she and her husband cruise in style.

“My fun car is a 1955 T-Bird,” she smiles slyly. “Turquoise and white.”

A statement, indeed.

⇒ SHARING THE ROAD ⇒

Frady has found a kindred spirit, a person equally passionate about antiques and culture in husband Steve Frady, known for his decades in local public service and most recently as now-retired police and fire spokesman for the city of Reno. In 1982, Steve represented the Comstock's Fire Museum at a liquidation auction of one of Bill Harrah's warehouses, shortly after Harrah's death. It was there he met his future wife.

“I was immediately attracted by Jackie's natural beauty and intelligence and her obvious compassion for and interest in people,” Steve Frady says.

The pair worked together in various professional capacities over the next few years.

They married in 1989, the same year the National Automobile Museum opened. A few years later, they had a son, Michael, now 19 and attending college at the University of Nevada, Reno. Jackie says Michael essentially grew up in the museum, a clearly transformative experience: He now owns a 1955 Ford pick-up, which she describes as “... in perfect, polished condition.”

In their spare time, Jackie and Steve spend time in their southwest Reno home, planning travel and together time. They also participate in an activity that pays homage to both of their passions. Steve is a former firefighter; Jackie, clearly, a longtime lover of antiques and vintage vehicles. So the pair regularly takes part in “musters,” friendly competitions involving fire trucks, fire hoses, obstacle courses, ladder climbs, and other activities to inspire camaraderie and reflect shared pride in the industry.

“We have a 1931 Rio fire truck that's been fully

restored,” Jackie says. “A few years back, my team actually won the California State Championship.”

“The firemen's musters have been a great family activity for us,” Steve adds, sharing that even son Michael participates. “We have many lifelong friendships as a result of our participation. Jackie's competitive, but keeps her sense of humor and just has a good time showing and competing.”

It's easy to imagine the tenacious, focused Jackie Frady maneuvering a lumbering fire truck, untangling lengthy fire hoses, and hitting targets with laser-like precision. Her entire professional career has taken shape by maneuvering through similar metaphorical challenges.

But through it all — whether juggling multiple priorities at work and home, overcoming the obstacles presented by a dramatically downturned economy, attempting to retire a multi-million dollar construction debt — she says she has kept focused on one critical piece of advice offered by Mark Curtis, Sr., who at the time he offered this tidbit of advice was handling Harrah's public relations.

“His advice was, ‘Do the right thing, and make sure the world knows about it.’” As she recalls those words, she leans forward in a chair in her modest National Automobile Museum office, scrutinizing red, hand-scribbled letters on a yellowing scrap of paper affixed to a bulletin board. “He told me this in 1988, and I've kept it with me ever since.”

⇒ CORRECTING COURSE ⇒

The tasks before her weren't always easy, as she remembers one particularly trying time during her career.

“When the opportunity came up to become executive director, it was a challenging time,” she reflects. “We had an outstanding construction debt of \$10 million, we were losing a couple hundred thousand a year — the picture was pretty bleak. And I wasn't sure this was an ‘opportunity’ I had been offered.”

She says she went to Kansas City to discuss the pros and cons with her brother, Steve Defenbaugh, a senior vice president for a Fortune 500 transportation service provider.

“He said, ‘Could it get any worse?’ she laughs at the memory. “I said, ‘No, it can't.’ So he said, ‘Then, you have an opportunity.’”

This was a defining moment, a decision that grounded her in anticipation of the challenges ahead. She says her first critical tactic was coming to an agreement with the Board of Trustees.

“The agreement was that if I could turn around the

operations side of the museum — get it into a break-even position or even showing a small profit — the board would then help with a plan for retiring the construction debt,” she says. “But if you couldn’t have the museum stand alone, there would be very little support for raising money to pay off the construction debt.”

With agreement in place, she says the realization was almost overwhelming: She now had to follow through on her part of the deal.

“I would take the budget home and lay it out on the dining room table and work numbers and numbers and numbers, reorganizing the personnel, reducing staff, restructuring, and for the first time, sending out the message that the museum needed help. Getting the message out to the community was very important, and it hadn’t been done before.”

The countless hours at the dining room table turned out to be time well spent.

“Jackie Frady is a rare event,” says Gordon Horsley, vice-chairman of the National Automobile Association Board of Directors. “We dumped all of this in her lap — a \$9.6 million construction debt, a struggling business — and she did everything in her power to hold it all together as well as make the community understand the story of our nonprofit. She guided the board and the staff, and today we are a debt-free entity with a substantial bank account.”

➔ IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT ➔

Along the way, she even tackled gender biases with the agility characterized by a high-end sports car.

“I entered into the field of collector car and car

‘Novel’ Heritage



The 1936 Mercedes-Benz 500 K Special Roadster is a car with a storied background. Literally.

“It’s a great heritage,” says Jay Hubbard, automotive collections manager for the National Automobile Museum. “I like to say it was bought with Sherlock Holmes money.”

The original owner was the son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the famed Sherlock Holmes character and innovator in the genre of crime fiction. Denis Percy Stewart Conan Doyle purchased the car as a wedding present for his wife, Georgian Princess Nina Mdivani.

“They honeymooned in Europe, driving the car all over,” Hubbard says. “And then came the war.”

According to Hubbard, only five of this upscale variety of roadster survived the war. And now, he says, this is the only active automobile of its kind in the world, with an estimated value of \$3 million.

But its famed and rich history were lost on some of the

intermediate owners, one of whom, a banker, purchased the vehicle in 1952 for a mere \$300.

“Odd to think that a car that sold for \$300 is now one of the most sought-after classic automobiles in the world,” Hubbard says. “It’s quite a piece of engineering, with its fully independent suspension and coil springs all the way around.”

Winthrop Rockefeller purchased the car in 1964 for \$20,000; a decade later, William Harrah purchased Rockefeller’s entire collection.

“This is one of the most beautiful cars in the world,” says Jackie Frady, executive director of the National Automobile Museum. “It has these stunning, flowing lines from headlight to taillight. It truly is a work of unparalleled art.”

What vintage car best epitomizes Jackie?

“In 2010, Jackie brought the ‘Lana Turner’ Chrysler to Hillsborough, and of all the cars she has brought us over the years this one, to me, epitomizes her with its unique style, grace, and glamour. But unlike the car, beautiful through it is, she’s flesh and blood, and alive.”

— JOHN JOSS, 25-YEAR MASTER OF CEREMONIES FOR THE HILLSBOROUGH CONCOURS D’ELEGANCE



museums when women weren’t necessarily considered for directors,” she says. “I can remember very early on, getting lots of phone calls asking for Mr. Frady or Jack Frady or the man in charge.”

But she shirked the stereotypes, making unparalleled strides in a male-dominated industry. Frady now is president of the National Association of Automobile Museums, serving a one-year term ending in April 2012.

“I am also an honorary judge for the Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance, which is one of the world’s finest automobile shows,” she says. “There are two women in the group of honorary judges, which is really flattering — it’s definitely a who’s who of the industry, and I feel really privileged to be in that role.”

Her peers reflect on a woman who has broken barriers and embraced challenges.

“Jackie is a polished and mature executive who handles her work and her contacts with exceptional skill and poise,” says John Joss, 25-year master of ceremonies for the Hillsborough Concours d’Elegance. “Interviewing her, as I have done many times, is always a pleasure because she is always in the moment, knowledgeable, and unfailingly articulate.

“She’s the real thing, worthy of all the respect due a capable and effective leader.”

➔ DRIVEN TO SUCCEED ➔

For Frady, leadership means making a difference, doing the best possible job, enjoying a balanced life with her family, and taking the time to say “thank you” to the many people who have contributed to the museum’s success, especially in hard economic times.

She also takes great pride in spreading the message



about the success of her museum: According to automotive magazines, “It has been recognized as one of the Top 10 Automobile Museums in the nation and among the Best 16 in the World,” she notes — as well as the importance of the car as a national symbol.

“The automobile has had a tremendous impact on the development of our nation,” she says. “Yet clearly, there is also a segment of the automobile that is definitely rolling art ... it is art on four wheels.” ■