

ST. LOUIS

Women

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Missouri's Dynamic Duo

busy but balanced

by Alicia McColl

It's not always easy to get two of the state's busiest women together at the same time and place. Add family and children to the mix and it can become near impossible. But they managed to cross paths for more than an hour for our photo shoot, putting aside better things they could be doing on a Friday afternoon, Valentines Day 2004.

I imagine to them, it just comes with the territory. Especially when you're talking about the heads of Missouri state's Democratic and Republican parties Ann Wagner and May Scheve. It's all in a day's work.

Both women do what they do for many of the same reasons although their viewpoints on issues are on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

That afternoon Ann Wagner, chairman of the Missouri State Republican Party, was just off a plane from Miami a couple of hours prior to our meeting. She is also the co-chairman of the Republican National Committee—a position she has held since 2001—and has an office in Washington, D.C. Because her nine-year-old daughter had a half-day at her school in St. Louis County, she brought Mary Ruth, whom she picked up on her way to the interview and photo shoot at the Regional Arts Commission on Delmar Blvd.

May Scheve-Reardon, Wagner's Democratic counterpart, arrived with a friend who answered cell phone calls. Scheve-Reardon had just taken batches of cake icing to her kids' preschool. She was elected as chairman in January 2002, the same year she was term-limited out of the Missouri State Legislature after 12 years of service.

Each woman has three children, a husband, school transportation schedules (and extra-curricular activities (all are in private schools) and the responsibility for shaping the state's future of each political party.

How do they do it?



President George W. Bush, Ann Wagner and Jim Talent in Kansas City during Talent's campaign for Senator.

"It just works," said Wagner, who said both positions require a lot of commitment and a lot of planning. Every day is different, and she may be in Boise, Idaho, one day and Miami the next. Then there may be a stretch of time in St. Louis. Over the past few years she has been to more than 40 states and many foreign countries assisting GOP organizations and helping spread the Republican message. She credits "super" staff, a big block calendar and a Blackberry PDA with an instant e-mail feature for helping her stay on top of her schedule.

"When I'm here, I plan my life around my kids, whether it's picking up my daughter at noon or going to my son's basketball game," said Wagner, who has three children—her daughter, Mary Ruth, and sons Raymond III, 15, and Stephen, 13.

Wagner graduated with honors from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1984 with a degree in Business Administration. Her concentration was in business logistics, which she said helps her with her endeavors nowadays. So did her singing experience. She was involved in musicals in her south county high school, Cor Jesu, and went on to attend college on a vocal music scholarship.

After graduating she worked in customer service departments at Hallmark

in Kansas City and Ralston Purina in town, where she and husband Ray, also from St. Louis were married.

Her husband Ray, an attorney practicing in St. Louis, worked as a legal advisor to former Governor John Ashcroft during his second administration. The couple lived in Jefferson City for five years. While there, she worked in the Energy Division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Because Wagner was in the right place at the right time, she was introduced to politics.

"There's only a couple things you can do if you live in a capital city," said Wagner. "Become involved in politics or work for the government."

Wagner served as the state's GOP's Director of the House and Senate Redistricting Committee in 1991, and in 1992 was the Missouri State Executive Director of the Bush/Quayle campaign. In 1994 she served as an advisor for the Ashcroft for Senate campaign.

She took a year off from political service after her last child was born in 1995. Then felt the Republican caucus was moving in a "divisive direction." At this point she decided to make a move.

She told her husband she was going for a drive to do some thinking. As she left she thought to herself "I will either

have a fourth child and learn to play golf or go file tomorrow." The next day she filed for the position on the state's Republican Committee. Once on the committee she was the first woman ever elected chairman. She dove into a strong grassroots initiative that would help the Republicans recapture and gain seats in the House of Representatives in 2002.

Scheve-Reardon said she "stumbled" into politics at an early age because she wanted a cool-looking T-shirt. Shortly after graduating from Saint Louis University in 1987 with a degree in Journalism, she and a friend were standing in line at a Burger King at Kenrick Plaza. They admired a gentleman with a Richard Gephardt for Lieutenant Governor campaign T-shirt. They asked where they could get one like it, and the man led them into a nearby campaign office. The two young women signed up to volunteer, and Scheve-Reardon got more than just the red, white and blue Tee.

"I just wanted the shirt," said Scheve-Reardon. "I got a whole career out of it."

The time spent as a grassroots volunteer for Gephardt, her experience with ailing parents (both died of cancer before she was 23) and their struggles with healthcare costs and a desire to see improvements in that system led Scheve-Reardon to seek political office. She ran for state representative for the 98th District in 1990 at the age of 25. As she learned campaigning for Gephardt, "going door-to-door" is the way to win. The district has the most Social Security recipients in the state. She won, beating out a 12-year Republican incumbent in a 69 percent Republican district to become the youngest woman ever to be elected to the Missouri General Assembly.

Scheve-Reardon stayed in the legislature for 12 years, active and hands-on. She served as chair of the Appropriations Committees and chairman of the state House's Democratic caucus. She helped the White-Rodgers Community Center get established in Affton, her home town. She said looking back her willingness to volunteer for a multitude of positions and committees in Jefferson City was probably due to her youth and what she describes as the "fearlessness" that often comes with it. Sometimes that youth worked against her, although, now, she can laugh about it.

"I'd always be mistaken by the [House] doorman and a secretary or spouse or girlfriend, not a sitting member," she said.

"One time a lobbyist came into my office when I was on the phone behind my desk and this guy asks 'Have you seen Representative Scheve? Do you know where he is?' I looked at him and said 'No I haven't.'" When she saw him on the House floor as she was being introduced to speak she passed him with a grin and said "Hi, how are you?"

Both women have incorporated their political service with family life. With the help of nannies and supportive husbands, the two are still very much on the move.

Scheve-Reardon was and is the only Missouri legislator to give birth to three children while holding office. She and her husband, Tim, have three children—Maddie, 6, Danny, 5, and Erin, 3-1/2. After her second child was born, she recalled, she was back at work in Jefferson City a week and a half later. Today, Scheve-Reardon travels Tuesday through Wednesday and on weekends. Her husband and children often accompany her.

Wagner enjoys taking her children with her one-on-one when she travels. In Washington and elsewhere she allows them the opportunity to see up-close history in

the making. "It's a front-row civics lesson for them," she said.

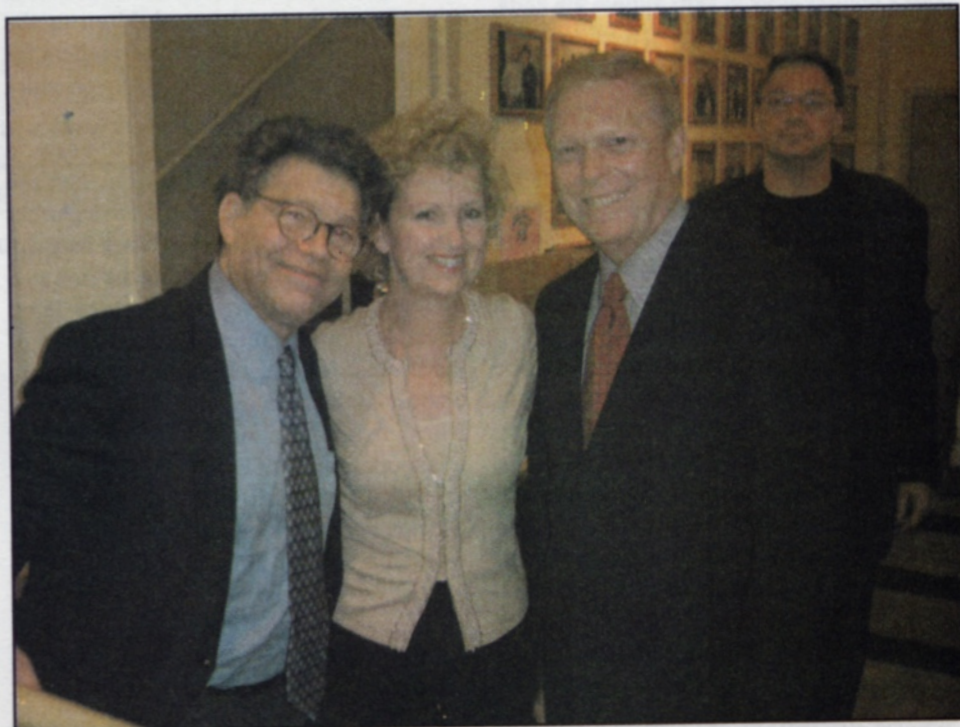
She remembers bringing her son to a prayer service, where President George Bush spoke after the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington. Exposing them to experiences like these give her children a broader perspective on world issues and the problems beyond their own worlds at home and school, she said. The Wagners work hard introduce the value of service to their children.

Wagner herself volunteers at her daughter's school, is in her church's choir and serves on the board of several charitable and non-profit organizations in the St. Louis area. She is also a Republican committee-woman for the Lafayette Township in West St. Louis County.

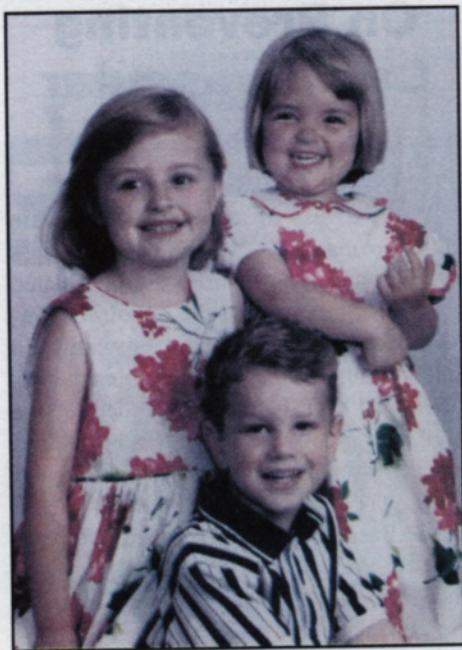
Both women say there are no cut and dry boundaries between their political life and family life. The two worlds almost have to work together, although not always smoothly.

Scheve-Reardon remembers standing in her kitchen making macaroni and cheese for her children while conducting a radio interview. The listener who called in was bashing all politicians and Scheve-Reardon remembers saying to herself "Why am I doing this?"

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Al Franken, May Scheve-Reardon and Richard Gephardt.



Maddy, Danny and Erin Reardon.

Wagner can recall several times when she first started work as co-chair for the RNC, she would board a plane in tears because she was missing one of her children's games. Some evenings she's been on the speaker phone in her Washington office going over spelling homework with Mary Ruth.

"Women can have it all, no doubt about it," said Scheve-Reardon. "But sometimes you miss out on some of the most enjoyable times at home.

"I so wanted to run for congress when Gephardt left to run for president," she said. "I'd be thrilled to be a member of the U.S. Congress and I think I'd be good at it.

"People would say, though, 'Oh, she has all those babies. How could she do it?' said Scheve-Reardon. "But you know, they're right. I don't look at what I gave up, though, I look at what I've gained."

She enjoys unplugging from her hard-charging position enjoying the outdoors with her kids or doing crafts with them around the kitchen table.

For now, Scheve-Reardon believes she is right where she needs to be. Her days with Gephardt and his grassroots message of "listening to people" have carried over into her personal life. She finds it fascinating to sit and talk with friends over lunch and discuss the merits and pitfalls of being a stay-at-home mom vs. a mom who works full-time.

Wagner remembers getting the phone call from the presidents office in 2001. They asked if she would be interested in co-chairing the Republican National Committee. They needed someone who knew how to win elections she was told. Right away Wagner made a list of 20 reasons why accepting the position would not work out. Her husband tore up the piece of paper and told her to "step off the cliff."

To this day she's glad he did. She said it has been a true adventure so far. "It's crazy, but it's become the norm."

Both believe they are in tune with unique challenges facing women, especially the work vs. family see-saw. "Sometimes it's like juggling an egg, a chainsaw and a bowling ball," said Wagner.

This experience however, can give women a multi-dimensional edge in political life. "Women are such good multi-taskers. Being a daughter, mother and wife builds who you are. It shapes how you approach issues."

She adds that although she's had many critics, both men and women, being a woman in the political realm hasn't been a hindrance to her success. "The fact that I was a woman was always kind of an asset. Maybe it's the novelty of it."

Because of her strong belief that women can make a difference through politics—they do make up 52 percent of the electorate, she points out—Wagner was instrumental in initiating the Winning Women initiative. The program, active in 14 states in the U.S. is a leadership-training program that helps women get involved in Republican politics at all levels.

Both women said they don't discount running for elected office in the future.

The day the two women met at the Regional Arts Commission for the photo shoot both joked about lipstick colors, whether or not to pose on the "right" or "left" side, and straightened jewelry and tucked stray hairs back in place for each other. Girls just being girls underneath it all with politics aside.

"I just exhale when the plane is back in St. Louis," said Wagner. "It's what's real. It's so good to be home from the Land of Oz."



Ann Wagner with her daughter, Mary Ruth, in the Rose Garden at The White House.

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