

Today, WHF leadership is even more accessible than it felt to me when I first joined. This has been a great attraction to the organization, motivated me to be more involved and helped me to deepen my relationship with female leaders in the industry both professionally and socially.



**Mary Pat Denney**

Managing Director, Risk Initiative Vertical, The Oakleaf Group



**Name:** Mary Pat Denney

**Membership Contribution:** Current member of WHF Programming Committee. Previously served on WHF Membership Committee and has supported WHF sponsorship engagements.

**Employer:** Managing Director, Risk Initiative Vertical, The Oakleaf Group, a Maryland-based firm.

**Hobby:** Getting out of suburbia and into nature is my go-to de-stressing strategy. I tend to head into the Blue Ridge Mountains and valleys with my husband, walking the endless options for trails and taking in the views and fresh air.

**Hometown:** Washington, DC Metro area

**Fun Factor:** I manage the business side of my daughter's acting and music recording career, which is such a different industry than the well-ordered financial institutions I generally work with. It provides valuable perspective to see how the creative people in the entertainment business make things happen more organically.

**1. How long have you been a member of WHF and how has the organization benefited you?** My original membership with WHF goes back to the early 2000s. I rejoined around 2010, having taken a six-year break when I was rarely in town due to extensive work-related travel. The educational programs have really helped me to stay on top of current events affecting the housing finance industry. In particular, the brown bags and public policy lunches have been a great way to engage with the people directly involved in the topic or regulation. Hearing their insights in a small setting is an amazing advantage of the Washington chapter of WHF: this is where the policy action is, and our members are very well connected to people at high levels in these influential positions! That's WHF DC's "special sauce." I equally value that in WHF, I have a group of professionals with whom I enjoy socializing. It's a nice mix of business and pleasure, so I always come away from events feeling fulfilled both professionally and personally, and confirming that it was well worth the effort to attend. Invariably, these connections help me in my current role with Oakleaf.

**2. What is your role at Oakleaf?** Oakleaf provides professional services and I manage one of our three "verticals" or service offerings: providing institutional clients with personnel support to execute initiatives, typically involving the transformation of processes and financial models and their infrastructures, and often in risk functions. I manage multiple active engagements within our existing clients, expand those relationships, lead our proposal process for new opportunities and develop relationships with prospective clients.

**3. You mentioned that you had worked in New York City prior to working for regional banks and regional offices of larger institutions in the Washington Metropolitan area. How did the Manhattan environment differ and has WHF helped you build new relationships?** When I worked for a bank division in New York with strong female leaders and racial diversity on the management team, I learned how important that is to my job satisfaction and career opportunities, so I still seek out those kinds of environments. Oakleaf, for example, is a small, woman-owned firm with a diverse workforce and a management team committed to principled operations. There are good options now for careers in firms like this. But the Metro DC area, when I arrived from NY, did not offer as many choices fitting this requirement. Networking at WHF has helped me access and deepen relationships and become aware of organizations with strong culture alignment in that respect. Today, WHF leadership is even more accessible than it felt to me when I first joined. This has been a great attraction to the organization, motivated me to be more involved and helped me to deepen my relationship with female leaders in the industry both professionally and socially.

**4. You may be aware that WHF has established a relatively new Mentorship Program. What is your view on mentorship? And what would you say to others, especially Young Professionals about mentorship and career development?** WHF's Mentorship Program makes a great deal of sense and I strongly encourage it. First, there are many members with extensive careers already in their rearview mirrors who have so much to offer those members at the beginning of their careers or those making a late-career transition. Second, the events WHF sponsors provide a perfect segue to identify mentoring relationships in the normal course. Mentorship is very important to career development but it isn't something to be forced: it requires both a logical and instinctive connection. Ideal mentoring relationships are not directly in a chain of command: you want someone looking out for you with a view across the organization and with whom you can have frank discussions. You also want a mentor who is further along in their career so they can offer perspective. In making a connection, you want a mentor who understands your strengths and challenges as well as someone who will feel free to provide you with important feedback you can trust.

**5. How do you make the best use of your day?** I try to never schedule more than half the day. This leaves me available to deal with "incoming" matters and not feel like I'm on that hamster wheel at the end of the day. I also take mini mental health breaks a couple of times a day, as our brains need this to be most effective. This can be just walking around the block or reading the news for 10 minutes to change the focus. Also- multitasking is a myth; I try not to let incoming emails distract me while doing something requiring concentration.

**6. What do you like most about what you do?** I like identifying solutions by drawing on my experience or learning something new and applying it, which I get to do a lot when addressing client requests. Equally, I enjoy building relationships.

**7. What inspires you?** People who are passionate about their work inspire me. Learning about science revealing the dynamics and mysteries of our universe inspires me.

**8. What is the best advice you have ever received?** On the professional front: Understand my unique strengths and value proposition to an organization and stay true to who I am. Keep doing the things that play to my strengths and provide ways to grow and

learn. On the personal front: It's a precious thing, this life- not to be wasted on worries and strife.

**9. What do you look up to the most and why?** I look up to people who follow their passion, overcome challenges and make an impact. That could be anyone: an artist, a family/household manager or someone in business. I am drawn to stories about these kinds of people and learn from how they found their passion and made a life or living pursuing it.