

# In a Time of Adaptation, Building Relationships Remains First

BY REBECCA L. BYRD

AS OF THE 1ST OF JANUARY, The Byrd Group became ByrdGomes. This new name reflects the most recent incarnation of what is one of Delaware's oldest and most dynamic lobbying firms. And while technology and the expectations of both clients and government officials has changed, one thing has not: Relationships.

The roots of ByrdGomes can be found in Wood, Byrd and Associates, which began when Bob Byrd joined Bill Wood in 1988. It was seen as two respected professionals coming together to form a powerhouse firm. The world looked very different then. There were no cell phones, internet, or wifi. Personal computers, fax machines and car phones were the latest technology. And lobbying was somewhat different then too. Clients got their lobbyists together for meetings held at beautiful locations with golf trips and expensive dinners. And things in Dover were different as well: there was more entertaining and later nights.

Over the next twenty-five years WoodByrd's business was extremely successful, and they were generally seen as a firm on the cutting edge. They worked with top grassroots professionals out of D.C., and they brought in new office technology. They also added to their staff, hiring Kim Gomes and Cindy diPinto as apprentice lobbyists.

In the past 10-plus years there has been a lot of change. First, Byrd, Gomes, and diPinto left to join a law firm, some of the first lobbyists to do so in Delaware. Then I joined in 2009, shortly before our dear friend Cindy passed away. Then in 2013 we left the law firm to strike out again on our own. Finally, in 2020 we changed the name to recognize the contributions of and the shift to the next generation.

At the same time, lobbying has changed. The internet and social media have changed many things about how we do business. There are fewer late nights in Dover and much less entertaining. Legislators and staff expect a lot of data and information from lobbyists to make good public policy decisions. Clients are also focused on information and results. Client meetings are not about golf and socializing; they are about learning the client's needs and issues. Frequently they include site visits. Since I've been doing contract lobbying, I've toured mail order pharmacies, a major lab servicing international clients, state-of-the-art distribution centers, and a nuclear plant.

But the thing that remains the same, and the thing that ByrdGomes always focuses on is relationships. Building relationships is extremely important in our business. We must have a good relationship with every legislator and every staff member we meet. We must also build good relationships



*Pictured from left: Rebecca Byrd, Robert Byrd, and Kim Gomes*

with our clients, which may seem obvious. But at times, we have to give our clients difficult advice that they may not want to hear. Each of us: Byrd, Gomes, and myself, bring our own professional and personal experiences and relationships to the table for our clients.

A recent example of how our firm operates successfully is the COVID-19 crisis. Starting about the third week of March, our business entered an unprecedented time. First, we were all working remotely. This included the cancellation of many in-person meetings and the postponement of legislative session. Second, almost all our clients had a concern or issue related to the crisis. Third, government was making major decisions which required input from our clients and affected them. This meant we had to get quick answers to and from government, set up meetings (now conference or video calls) quickly, and rely on phone calls, emails, and texts instead of personal conversations.

Our own firm had to change the way we worked too. Instead of weekly staff meetings and ad-hoc conversations, we started having daily conference calls to keep up with what each of us was dealing with. As of this writing, we think, and hope our clients agree, we have been successful.

We are successful because we continue to stay true to two things: building good relationships and having flexibility to adapt to changes in the world

around us. ByrdGomes looks forward to our next 30 years of success, knowing that we are ready to meet the needs of our clients in an ever-changing world. ■



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