

# Two colleagues at Davenport & Co. mark 65 years of work

BY JOHN REID BLACKWELL Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Saturday, September 12, 2015 10:30 pm

Most people look to retire around age 65.

Yet co-workers Henry L. Valentine II and Beverley “B.B.” Munford III don’t seem the slightest bit interested in retirement, even after working for 65 years.

Valentine and Munford continue to put in daily work hours in the downtown offices of Davenport & Co., the venerable Richmond-based brokerage firm where the two lifelong friends started their careers on the same day: Sept. 5, 1950.

“I don’t know what I would do if I wasn’t here,” said Valentine, who turns 88 on Tuesday.

“It is a nice place to hide, so to speak, and they are nice to let us come in,” he said. “A lot of places would say, ‘Bye bye.’”

When asked what has kept him going to work for 65 years, Munford quipped, “Well, we do get paid.”

“We did not expect to be here at 88 and 87, but here we are,” Munford said last week at Davenport’s James Center office.

“I’ve got my eye on 90, just for the hell of it,” Munford said. “It won’t be but a year and half. And Henry will be 90 in two years.”

“I am just a child by your standards,” Valentine replied.

Moments later, the staff of Davenport gathered to raise glasses of champagne in a toast to their 65th year.

“Sixty-five years of doing anything is a pretty remarkable accomplishment,” said I. Lee Chapman IV, the company’s president and chief executive officer.



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Henry L. Valentine II (left) and Beverley “B.B.” Munford III have marked 65 years of working at Davenport & Company, a Richmond-based brokerage. Sept. 8, 2015.

“The reason they have been successful is because they have been focused on one thing, and I think it’s the reason Davenport has been successful and thrived for so long,” Chapman told the crowd.

“They have focused on bringing good investment ideas to their clients. The reward has been watching and helping their clients grow their wealth.”

Davenport, which was founded during the Civil War, employed about 15 people when Valentine and Munford started. It now has more than 400 employees and 20 offices in five states.

Valentine and Munford have held leadership roles with the firm and remain emeritus members of its board. Today they still work with clients on investments.

Such a lengthy tenure at any workplace is rare. Only about 4 percent of the U.S. workforce is 75 or older, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At Davenport & Co., the average length of tenure is 12 years.

The median tenure for U.S. workers at their current jobs was a little less than five years, based on data from January 2014, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The median length of tenure for people over 70 at their jobs was 10.4 years.

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**Munford can** point out the window of Valentine’s 11th-floor corner office to the place where Davenport was located when they started with the firm.

“It was right over there that we went to work 65 years ago, at 1113 East Main,” he said. “I don’t remember much about it except walking up the iron fire escape in back that we used to go to the parking lot.”

Valentine and Munford grew up as friends in Richmond, attending Albert H. Hill Elementary School, St. Christopher’s and Woodberry Forest schools, and graduating from the University of Virginia together.

Their first job at Davenport paid \$200 a month and included helping wire operators take orders for stock sales and writing the latest stock quotes on the chalkboards that everyone else checked to keep track of prices.

“We’d have these guys who sat in the boardroom holler at us when we were marking the chalkboard, if we missed one,” Munford said. “But we got along and didn’t get in any fights with our customers.”

The chalkboards have since morphed into computers.

On his desktop computer, “I have got two screens that have about 140 stocks on them,” Valentine said. “And they are changing all day long.”

“The way the business is transacted is totally different,” he said. “That’s one thing about this business: If you don’t like it today, it is going to change tomorrow.”

As for whether all the changes in technology and communications over 65 years have made things easier or better, the two men have mixed opinions.

“I don’t think it was that difficult to adjust to, but at the same time, it is completely different,” Munford said.

“There are so many sources of information now; it can be overwhelming,” Valentine said. But he considers it mostly positive.

He turns more skeptical, though, about so-called “black-box,” or high-frequency, trading systems, in which computer algorithms are used to automatically buy or sell stocks in vast quantities, in fractions of a second.

“I think that is one of the reasons why a lot of people out there say, ‘I am not going to buy stock.’ They think they are at a total disadvantage.”

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**In 65 years**, the men have seen quite a few swings in the markets, and gone through both bull and bear markets. Both mention 1974 as one of the worst downtimes.

“There was no volume in this business,” Valentine said. “None. Brokers got out of the business in 1974 by the thousands.”

The downturn of 2008 and 2009 was bad, too, but the market has recovered.

As for its recent gyrations, Valentine chalks it up to a periodic correction.

“The stock market always gets too enthusiastic, and it has a correction,” Valentine said. “That’s healthy.”

As to whether they are bullish or bearish on the next few years, or the next decade or so, Valentine said: “At our age, we don’t even buy green apples.”

Although Valentine is concerned about the long-term ramifications of U.S. indebtedness, he is optimistic about the economy and the future.

“You can hear all these old coots saying that the world is going to hell,” he said. “I think it is going to be fine, but somebody does have to solve some problems.”

Many organizations do set a mandatory retirement age, but Chapman said Davenport is small enough that it does not need to set an arbitrary number.

What the firm gains most from having Valentine and Munford remain on board is perspective, which

is important in the investing business, he said.

“Their life experiences and perspective on markets like what we have been through in the last few weeks is invaluable,” he said.

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**Valentine and Munford** also have seen Richmond’s independent brokerages mostly disappear.

“Richmond used to have nine or 10 independent brokerages,” Valentine said. “I would guess we are the largest one still standing that is still owned by its employees.”

“The fact that we have been here as many years as we have indicates that we have done a reasonably good job,” Munford said, speaking of the company.

Valentine, who is Davenport’s former chairman and chief executive officer, attributed the firm’s longevity to a sense of reverence for its history.

“So many young guys start a business with a mind to sell it,” he said.

“I think the mind-set as we were coming along was that somebody else had laid the foundations for a decent business,” he said. “We determined that it really wasn’t ours to sell. We were lucky enough to be a part of it coming along, and we let it stay that way.”

“I think it is a heck of a business, still,” Valentine said. “The future is bright here. We are just a flea crawling up an elephant’s leg, but I would not hesitate, if I was a young guy, to come work here.”