

Guardian of the Club Coffers: a personal look

BY LAWRENCE R. LESIGER

It was a cold, wintry day in February 1945, when the future treasurer of the Cadillac-LaSalle Club came into this world in Brooklyn, New York. Who would have thought that from such humble beginnings would come the owner of five desirable Cadillacs as well as the esteemed national treasurer of the Cadillac-LaSalle Club.

Throughout those early formative years, I was always interested in automobiles and, as most antique car hobbyists, could tell the year and make of an automobile from looking at the grille or the tail lights. In retrospect, when thinking about the old neighborhood, the thought of owning even one Cadillac was alien to our life-style.

At the age of eighteen, the legal driving age in New York, I purchased my first automobile, a 1957 Ford. I paid the princely sum of \$90.00. HOWEVER, when I attempted to acquire insurance for my new wheels of freedom, I was told that it would cost \$425.00 per year to insure the \$90.00 vehicle. Even at that tender age, my financial intuition told me that this did not make sense. I, however, still wanted to be able to drive the automobile, so I registered the car in my wife's-to-be name in Upstate New York—the price of insurance came down to \$100.00, which made a lot more sense.

I graduated from City College of New York in 1965 with a Bachelor's Degree, which specialized in both education and finance. At the time, I thought that perhaps teaching might be a career path. Simultaneously, I was employed at a hospital in New York City. I was advised to consider a new program in hospital administration, which appeared to offer a tremendous opportunity since it was a relatively new field. I applied and was accepted at George Washington University. At George Washington, I acquired a Master's Degree in business administration, specializing in both hospital and nursing home administration. My career eventually led to a move to St. Petersburg, Florida, where I acquired my first Cadillac, a Calais Coupe. It came with the new job.

Subsequently, a move was made back to the Northeast, allowing for the acquisition of a 1971 Eldorado Convertible; it served as my everyday vehicle for five years. We are now in our twenty-second year of ownership of this prestigious Cadillac convertible. Other vehicles acquired over the years include a 1964 Eldorado Convertible, a 1959 Series 62 Convertible, a 1955 Pink Elvis Presley Sedan, and a 1973 Fleetwood Brougham with an original 8,000 miles on the odometer.

When time was available, I did have the opportunity to do some repair work and assist in the restoration of the cars, but as time grew shorter and life got faster, I fortunately found a good mechanic. Claire Cathers, who is now eighty-six years young, still continues to maintain my fleet of pride and joys.

In addition to the cars, I have an extensive collection of Cadillac memorabilia, including every data book from 1950 right through 1999, every sales brochure from 1950 through



1999, as well as over 200 models of Cadillac motor cars. Perhaps one day, these items will be donated to our newly formed Cadillac-LaSalle Museum and Research Center, Inc.

Not content with collecting vintage cars and literature, I ventured into the world of collectible boats, which has been very interesting—to say the least. Ilene and I purchased a 1964 38-foot Chris Craft Cabin Cruiser. Although my first choice was to name the boat *FINS* after my '64 Eldorado and '59 convertible, the aforementioned member of my household declared "*FINS* is not a proper name for the boat; the boat will be christened the *Queen Ilene*." You go with the flow.

Since 1975, I have had the opportunity to work as a mortgage banker for First Mutual Corp., which is family owned and operated. In the early days, I started an automobile finance division for the company; it was a successful venture, which helped the company to flourish. Being an old car hobbyist, I, of course, have utilized and enjoyed the service tremendously. Currently, I am the president and CEO of the organization, which does mortgage business in four northeastern states. First Mutual is the oldest independent mortgage company within the State of New Jersey.

I discovered the Valley Forge Region in 1977 and became a member of the CLC in 1978. I joined the national board of directors in 1984 and have been treasurer since 1990.

Before my involvement at national level, I was very active in the Valley Forge Region. It was a pleasure to work with the great people in this region and to serve on the local board for many years. The big crunch came in 1985 when I chaired the Grand National held in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

I also serve as treasurer of the newly organized Cadillac-LaSalle Club Museum and Research Center, Inc. Hopefully, as we move to elect only the second board (see page 5) for the fledgling museum, the new board will continue to nurture her, building, in the not too distant future, a strong organization comparable to the parent club.

While attending graduate school, I recollect when Dr. Gintzig, the department chairman, spoke to his new students and mentioned that the coming year would be one of the most difficult of our lifetime. That was certainly true. There is, however, one other thing that Dr. Gintzig said and that was, "As difficult as things will be in the coming year, the one thing you should remember is *never lose your sense of humor*." Over the years, I have tried to be guided by that jewel of wisdom; it has certainly made dealing with difficult times much easier—and made the good times even better. □