



# THE PFS FAMILY ALBUM

*Milestones and Stories of the People at Premier*

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## We Recognize Suzy de Bary: Redefining the Meaning of “Team Player” at Premier Over the Past 16 Years

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Many successful teams -- in business as well as sports -- have an individual member who consistently steps up, often without being asked, who goes far beyond what's expected of them. They not only perform their own job well; they also coach and inspire team members to raise the quality of their performance, individually and collectively. It's not a skill they were taught. It's a natural gift they share with others.

Premier's Operations Manager, Suzanne (Suzy) de Bary, discovered her gift for coaching and mentoring at a summer softball clinic during her Junior year at the University of Connecticut, where she was a member of that Division 1 school's Women's Softball team. Over her past 16 years at Premier, Suzy has continued to pursue what she describes as her "passion in life," by training, teaching, and encouraging scores of team members to succeed. Very simply, Suzy de Bary is a team player who cares about people.

## Suzy Builds a Career In Her Own Hometown

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Suzy and her family moved from New York City to Roxbury, Connecticut, when she was 5 years old. A self-

proclaimed "country girl," she participated in activities ranging from ballet, tennis, choir and 4-H Club, to competitive swimming, Girl Scouts and Little League baseball. In high school, Suzy began to play softball competitively, and joined a travel team which allowed her to play the game year-round. Softball also allowed Suzy to showcase her athletic talent to college scouts, leading to her recruitment to the University of Connecticut and an invitation to join its Women's Softball team.

Even then, as the UConn team's catcher, Suzy's focus was on teamwork: "I loved everything about being a catcher. You're in the heart of everything, and you're working one-on-one with the pitcher. It becomes kind of a duet trying to get the batter out, with whatever pitcher you have."

Her first summer after graduating from UConn, Suzy interned at Marquette de Bary Co., Inc, a New

*"I've never had two days exactly the same. There's always a different puzzle or project to work on."*

**- Suzanne de Bary**  
Operations Manager



UConn Softball Team - Suzy at bat



**Premier Financial Services**

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York City-based investment firm founded by her grandfather. After commuting into work with her father, who also worked at the brokerage firm, and getting a small taste of corporate life in Manhattan, Suzy decided to look for career opportunities closer to home; even applying for a position as a police officer in three nearby towns.

Responding to an employment ad for an office assistant, Suzy spent nearly 4 hours in interviews with three individuals at Premier, including Operations VP, Alexis Chacchia, who were all impressed. Suzy recalls, "By the time I got home from the interview, Alexis called me with the job offer. So I drove right back to Premier, signed the paperwork, and started the following Monday." It turned out to be an important day, both for Suzy and for Premier.



Suzy and Alexis Chacchia

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### Always Willing and Eager to Try Something New

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The curiosity and enthusiasm that Suzy demonstrated as a young girl, always exploring new hobbies and activities, is reflected in the range

of roles and responsibilities she's taken on over the course of her long career at Premier. Following her initial stint as an office assistant, Suzy has held nearly every position of responsibility at the firm, ranging from Operations and Information Technology to Human Resources.

Not surprisingly, Suzy has demonstrated a natural talent for HR; even developing a core competencies training course designed to develop the skills and behaviors necessary for employees (and several interns over the years) to succeed at Premier and in their personal lives. Sometimes those competencies involve the proper way to answer the phone, or to respond to customer requests. Sometimes they communicate the importance of using proper vocabulary, or not wearing ripped jeans at the office. All times, according to Suzy, "You make it a human moment, not a 'you did something wrong' moment."

Suzy's HR skills were put to the test very early in her career at Premier. During the 2008 economic recession, and like many businesses, the company was forced to reduce the number of its employees. Suzy was not only involved in that difficult task, she was also asked to take on additional responsibilities, including sales support, and backing up the firm's IT administrator. Her response was then, and always had been, "Teach me what you want me to do."

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### Suzy's Technology Advice: "Have You Re-Booted?"

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Technology proved to be Suzy's most challenging role at Premier, particularly in 2013, when she was asked to take over as the firm's IT Administrator. She recalls, "I knew nothing about technology, but I dove in." Suzy's definition of 'diving in' consisted of taking a 6-week A+ CompTIA certification course in New York to learn the basics of cybersecurity; IT infrastructure and networking; operating systems; troubleshooting and documentation best practices, so that she could provide "excellent IT support for Premier's employees and customers."

That initial IT course wasn't sufficient for Suzy. She also took it upon herself to train and earn certifications in Apple technical support; and to earn FileMaker certification, as well as a "Women of FileMaker" scholarship, which entitled her to attend the FileMaker Developers Conference in 2018. She also built the firm's first "IT How-To" manual for easy referencing.

Looking back on her growth as an IT specialist, Suzy believes it fits her passion for helping people perfectly. "I love it when I can figure out a really tough technology problem to make something work. Also, when you do that, people think you're a wizard, which is fine by me." Despite the steep learning curve, Suzy now says moving

into IT has been one of the most rewarding aspects of her career.

She also admits that, despite all her training, computers can have a mind of their own at times. She offers some simple advice for people before they call for IT support. "I never fully appreciated how rebooting a machine could fix so many things. I know that I sound like a broken record, but the first question I always ask is, "Did you reboot your computer?," because that often resolves the issue."

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### **Facing Down Flooding, A Tornado and a Pandemic**

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Sometimes bad things happen for a good reason, and that was twice the case for Premier. In 2015, flooding in the company's basement was the catalyst for scanning thousands of physical documents into a file server. In 2019, a rogue tornado touched down in northeast Connecticut, knocking out power for several days, and causing Premier to quickly relocate vital operating systems in order to conduct its nationwide business remotely from employees' homes.

The "payoff" for those unfortunate events became clear to Suzy during the pandemic. "Because we had scanned all the documents, there was no need to go into the office for them. The tornado served as a dress rehearsal for operating remotely. When COVID struck, we never skipped a beat. We were well prepared to handle what has turned out to be a historic volume of new business."

On a personal basis, having to deal with unexpected events and new challenges is one reason why Suzy has enjoyed such a long career at Premier: "I've never had two days that are exactly the same since I started working here. There's always a different puzzle or challenge to work on here. As a result, I've been given many opportunities to learn and grow."

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### **Suzy's Professional Growth Plan: Her 2 ½ Year Secret Project**

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Suzi's self-motivation and ongoing quest to improve her professional credentials has not been limited to her role as IT Administrator. Based on her passion for Human Resources, and her strong desire to learn more about the profession, in 2016 she enrolled in UConn's Graduate School of Business, to obtain her master's degree in Human Resource Management. Over the 2 ½ years it took to earn the degree, Suzy told no one at Premier about her studies.



Suzy graduates with Master's degree from UCONN

She recounts the experience: "I went to work, then came home and did schoolwork from around 8 to 10 pm every night. There were papers, projects and tests. There were deadlines on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays to be met, and once a month I had to physically meet at UConn's Hartford campus. Of course, there were sacrifices, including no TV or movies, or socializing with friends."

Two weeks before her graduation ceremony, Suzy finally told Premier's founders about her achievement, and they were astounded and appreciative. Typical of her outlook on life, Suzy's excitement over earning an advanced degree was based on how it might help other people, rather than herself. She said, "The best part was that I was able to bring what I learned to the office, and it was the basis of the talent development program I built. It was so much fun, people were engaged in it, and you could really see that it was making an impact at Premier."

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### **The Reputation of Millennials; Career Guidance for all Age Categories**

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Over the course of her career, Suzy has interviewed countless candidates for various positions and worked with people from every generation. Her viewpoint on Millennials is somewhat unique: "They grew up with cell phones in their hands, and they're good at texting friends, which doesn't help when sending an email to the company's CEO. They rarely talk

to people on the phone, which is an issue when handling customer phone calls. But with proper training -- including mock phone calls -- they can be as proficient as any generation. And in terms of motivation and work ethic, it depends on the individual, and has nothing to do with what year you were born."

Based on her experience, Suzy offers advice for people who are at any stage of their professional career: "Be willing to roll your sleeves up and learn. There's often a misunderstanding, particularly at small companies, that you'll be confined to a single role. But real growth will occur only if you're willing to do anything. Look for ways you can be of help, and avoid the "it's not my job" attitude."

With respect to her own career path, Suzy claims, "I would not trade the experience I've gained at Premier for anything." She's also

excited over the company's future growth prospects since Premier's acquisition by 1st Financial Bank USA, which she expects will provide a market advantage.

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### Suzy's Future Plans; Paging Dr. De Bary?

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Suzy as Coach of the Shepaug Storm Softball travel team

Outside of work, Suzy is no less involved in helping other people. Her spare time activities have included coaching local softball teams, and knitting baby blankets that she donates to charity. Her current list of hobbies includes painting, snowshoeing, and

playing the flute, " a little piano" and guitar. She also is a red belt in the martial art Tang Soo Do, which she intends to "get back to." She enjoys the outdoors and hiking, and loves "the idea of camping, but I've never done it."

Over the years, she's been told by many people that she should consider a second career as a teacher or coach. Her response: "I can see myself teaching at some point in my life, but it wouldn't be teaching anything traditional, like history. I might be a life coach, teaching people a wide variety of skills they need to succeed in a professional workplace."

Suzy is also considering going back to school to earn her doctorate degree, perhaps in human resources. If the past is any guide, Dr. de Bary is unlikely to tell anyone what she's up to, until the week before she graduates.



**Celebrating its 24th anniversary in 2021,  
Premier continues to grow and succeed  
for one simple reason: great people like  
Suzy de Bary work here...and they stay here.**

