



## All in the family

*Jeff Austin Jr., Chairman of the Board, Austin Bank, Texas N.A., Jacksonville*

*“We all learned long ago to leave the banking business at the bank. But that’s also always been hard for us, because, as the community’s banker, banking is your life.”*

**F**or Jeff Austin Jr., banking is the family business. As a third-generation banker, a second-generation TBA chairman and the father of TBA’s incoming 2010 chairman, Jeff Austin III, the name Austin has been synonymous with banking in Frankston for a long time.

In fact, the Austin family has a 100-year history in banking. It was 1909 when John Austin Sr. started a small community bank in Frankston. With the passage of time, his sons, John Austin Jr. and Jeff Austin Sr. took over, branching out into other banks in Frankston, Jacksonville and several other East Texas cities. In time, Jeff Austin Jr. himself was given the reins of the banks, and later, his son, Jeff Austin III, came on the scene as another high-profile community banker bearing the Austin name.

### 50 years in banking

Austin still actively serves as chairman of Austin Bank, the First State Bank of Frankston, the First State Bank of Athens, and Capital Bank Houston. He was recently honored by the Texas Bankers Foundation as a 50-Year Banker. In over 50 years of service to the industry, he has seen changes from unit banking to chain banking, then from holding company banking to branch banking. He served on the Finance Commission, as a



**Jeff Austin Jr. and his wife, Sissy, at the Great Wall of China.**

director of the Houston branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, and later as a director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. He served as TBA Chairman, then called the TBA President, from 1988-1989. He has seen mergers and acquisitions, bank closings and openings and astounding changes in banking technologies.

“Back when I was involved with TBA, the fax machine was in vogue as the quickest type of communication,” Austin said. “We thought it was just great. And back when I was just a typical small-town banker’s son, hanging out at the bank in between homework and after-school sports, I was usually stuck sweeping, but sometimes I would help with posting books or filing checks. And going back even further, when I see our bank’s hand-written ledgers from the 1910s, the penmanship is just amazing. In the world of the copy machine, who takes the time to write like that anymore? Times really have changed.”

Austin, who graduated from high school in Frankston in 1956 and from the University of Texas at Austin in 1960, served for 18 months in the Army and National Guard before settling down to life as a banker.

“Deep down I always thought I’d end up working in a bank,” Austin said. “It was just a natural choice. At the very least, I always knew I’d have a job waiting at the bank for me if I needed it.”



**Jeff Austin Jr. with his granddaughters, Blynn, left, and Emily, and his wife, Sissy, at the 2009 TBA Convention in San Antonio, where Austin was honored as a 50-Year Banker.**

## A family affair

The Austin family's banking roots aren't just linear. Austin's wife, Sissy, works as a lending officer and on the executive committee of Austin bank, and his sister, Jane Chapman, is a bank director and member of the bank's executive committee. Other bankers in the family include Chapman's son Michael, as well as various other cousins and spouses.

"Our family history is entwined in the history of the bank," Austin said. "Some people ask if there's a lot of family drama because of that, but there isn't. We just grew up this way. Sure, we have good days and bad days, but at the end of the day we're all on the same page. It's a wonderful challenge. We all learned long ago to leave the banking business at the bank. But that's also always been hard for us, because, as the community's banker, banking is your life. You can't just change your banking hat when you walk out of the building. It's a constant role, one that comes with both constant respect and constant expectations. And our whole family lives that every day."

## A TBA legacy

Austin was also the second of three generations to serve as TBA chairman. In 1966, his father, Jeff Austin Sr., was instrumental in TBA's move from Dallas to Austin. In 2010, his son, Jeff Austin III, will take the TBA helm in the midst of one of the largest national economic maelstroms in recent history. And Austin himself was the volunteer leader of TBA during a similarly devastating crisis in the '80s.

"My tenure was in the late '80s, which, as you've heard, was a very challenging time for banks in Texas," Austin said. "We saw many flagship banks in Texas go down. Back in the day, there were no such things as branches and there were even rules to govern how far a drive-thru could be from the bank building. But, as the banking industry has evolved, I have watched TBA survive by evolving with it and being an organization for both community and regional banks. The world is vastly different today, and the world of today is



**Three generations of Austin family bankers.**  
From left, Jeff Austin Sr., Jeff Austin Jr. and Jeff Austin III.

probably vastly different from the world of 50 or 100 years from now."

During Austin's tenure as president, however, the greatest challenge he faced was not Texas' economic woes, but rather the realization that TBA was overly dependent on member dues for income. Austin and his fellow board members, together with the TBA staff of the time, searched for and implemented ways for TBA to become more self-sustaining. Many of these programs, such as the TBASCO division, various educational events, the Texas Bankers Insurance Agency and the TBA Red Book, still exist to this day and help to keep TBA financially solid with non-dues revenue. "It was very similar to a shift that many banks saw at the same time," Austin said. "Banks were expanding into areas of non-interest income, so TBA expanded into non-dues income. TBA has always grown alongside its member banks."

During his tenure, Austin also had the privilege of working with several well-known bankers of his day whose names still echo in the halls of TBA all these years later. Among those he wished to thank by name were Bookman Peters of Bryan, Lowell "Stretch" Smith Jr. of Rio Vista and C. Ivan Wilson of Corpus Christi. "These were all great men and great



**Jeff Austin Jr., center, as chairman-elect of TBA, at a 1988 Washington Blitz. Austin is shown speaking with Texas banker Hugh Frederick of El Paso, left, and U.S. Congressman Ronald Coleman of El Paso.**

bankers," Austin said. "It was a pleasure to serve alongside them."

## A new community

Austin and his wife Sissy, who has worked for NASA in addition to working at the Austin family's bank, have three grown children and nine grandchildren. "She really is my best friend," Austin said of his wife.

Jeff Jr. and Sissy are fond of traveling, having traveled to such exotic locales as China and Australia, and love to spend time on the water, whether in their own boats on Lake Jacksonville or on oceangoing cruise ships. Austin also loves hunting, golf, photography and reading. However, he really feels that his life's work in banking has been his true calling, and one that he is proud to pass on to future generations, in his own family and beyond.

"Every bank is a reflection of its community," Austin said. "It's a challenge to the newest generation of bankers. With the changes in banking over the past 50 years have come a change in the definition of community. Once, your customers were your neighbors and friends; now it's more. It's not just your hometown, but your county, your state, your country that you're serving. With the Internet, you even have the potential to serve the whole global community. The world is changing; the industry is changing. How will you change to keep up with it?" ♦