

# Leading

## DANA DELANY

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

lands an important new role as co-president of arts advocacy group The Creative Coalition, even as she tears up Wisteria Lane on *Desperate Housewives* and dreams of returning to her roots on Broadway.

**“I’m an extremely** efficient traveler,” says *Desperate Housewives* star Dana Delany. “I was recently in Toronto for the film festival, where I caught George Clooney’s new film, *Up in the Air*. It opens with this hilarious scene with his character at the airport—he’s the guy who knows *exactly* which line to check in, how to pick the right security agent, how to sail through the place faster than anybody else—and I was just laughing my head off, because that’s me. It’s gotten to the point where I love to travel by myself, because my friends just can’t keep up!”

Good thing Delany, 54, possesses such a talent. The longtime Angeleno is traveling a lot these days now that she’s officially bicoastal. The success of her latest role as wacky Wisteria Lane’s newest resident, the competitive Katherine Mayfair, has paid off handsomely with critics—and with a heftier salary that’s funding her new jet-set lifestyle.

“I finally bought an apartment in New York,” she beams proudly. “It’s in Greenwich Village, near Washington Square. I moved in November. My plan is to do *Housewives* as long as I can, go back and forth between New York and L.A., and return to the theater where I first started, on Broadway.”

But other, loftier responsibilities will see her logging plenty of cabin-pressurized-air time, too—and not just on flights to JFK, but to Washington Dulles and Reagan National. In August 2009, Delany was named co-president of The Creative Coalition, based in Washington, D.C. This nonprofit, nonpartisan social and political advocacy arm of the entertainment industry was

founded in 1989 by prominent figures in the creative community, including actors Alec Baldwin, Ron Silver, Susan Sarandon and the late Christopher Reeve. Its mission is to “educate and mobilize leaders in the arts community on issues of public importance, specifically in the areas of First Amendment rights, arts advocacy and public education.”

So she’s a busy lady. But Delany’s old friend, new chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts Rocco Landesman, would not accept “no” for an answer. And when another old pal, actor Tim Daly, asked her to step up and serve as his co-president, it was a done deal.



#### How often do you make it to D.C.?

This year, a lot more, what with The Creative Coalition. And it’s the best time, isn’t it? Washington is having this renaissance.

#### How did Rocco Landesman get you to lead The Creative Coalition?

He asked me out to lunch last November. We’ve been friends a long time, and he said, “I’m thinking of throwing my hat into the ring for chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.” And I told him: “You *have* to do it! You’re perfect! You understand the business end, the creative side, and you’ll shake up the town with your colorful personality.” I said, “What else will you do with your life? You’ve already done it all!” But it was his idea, which makes it even braver in my mind, to go after something like that. It’s the good-citizen thing to do. So he got nominated.

#### And...?

[Around this same time] The Creative Coalition had asked me to do an interview with [White House Social Secretary] Desiree Rogers. A one-on-one with her, also in New York.

#### What was she like?

She’s gorgeous. A really interesting woman. A little bit opaque, I found, which is her job to be. She has to keep a certain decorum. So there’s a wonderful accessibility to a point, and then she has to protect the White House, which I appreciate. [She and I] had this great one-on-one [for The Creative Coalition] and then Tim Daly asked me,

“Would you consider being co-president?” At first I said no, I’ve got too much on my plate. But then I had my lunch with Rocco. He said to me, “I want to call on The Creative Coalition to help further the argument for funding for the arts.” So I said to Rocco: “I cannot believe you’re throwing the same argument back in my face! That’s not fair!” But obviously, I wound up saying yes.

#### Tell us about your new duties.

I’m still figuring them out. The job bends to the interests of whoever’s involved. My personal interest is more public school funding for the arts. Growing up, I truly benefited from that—it had a huge impact on me. I went to public school until I was 16. To this day I still think of my music teacher, Mrs. Grundwald. We did two shows a year in elementary school. You don’t have to grow up to become an actor, but that time of my life is among my fondest memories. We learned responsibility, discipline—the arts are great for the economic community, too, great for your soul. I don’t think we can ignore that.

#### How do your goals jibe with Tim Daly’s, your co-president?

Tim’s interests are more about going into schools and working directly with kids. My interest is the law and funding. I probably will go, as my next step, to Washington to meet with Rocco and discuss a game plan, because that’s his interest, too—dealing with First Amendment issues. Also, media illiteracy. With so much Internet access for kids, it’s about teaching them to decipher it for themselves.

#### You did the Emmys in September, and handed out the award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series. You also had the best line of the night: “I like a man who delivers week after week!” Bet you were bummed Jon Hamm didn’t win.

That was my line! But it’s so stressful. I love presenting, but I hate getting ready, choosing the dress. Jon Hamm [of *Mad Men*] and I are actually friends. He’s a big flirt. But I’m *obsessed* with that show. I watched that first episode and I thought: “That’s my childhood! Every detail is correct!” Living in Connecticut, the dad going off to work in New York, the unhappy housewife thing. So I called [show creator] Matt Weiner, and he gave me the runaround. It took six months, but my agent finally called and asked, “Can you have dinner with Matt tonight?” So we had dinner at the Chateau [Marmont], had the best time. But at the end of the evening,

Matt goes, “Dana, *what* I am going to do with you? You’re too well-known! We only want unknowns on the show.” And I said: “I don’t want to be on *Mad Men*. I want to be on your *next* show. I’m planning ahead.” He laughed and said, “Oh, all right. You’ve got it.” Now we’re friends.

#### You love to travel, especially to Ireland.

I did a talk show there, in Dublin. It was a gas. I hadn’t been back there since I was dating an Irish guy when I was 29, so it’s been awhile. That town has changed! And also, being of Irish heritage, people knew who I was. It was so nice.

#### You love London, too. Recommendations?

I like that new hotel in London, the **SoHo Hotel** [sohohouselondon.com]. They also opened one in New York, **The Crosby Street Hotel** [sohohouseny.com], owned by the same chain of boutique hotels. I really love to fly. Love airports, couldn’t be happier. I love Europe; I’ve done all of Europe. And I love South America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay. And eastern Asia is so incredible: Thailand, Vietnam...

#### If you had to choose one place to travel to, and just one place, what would it be?

A place I haven’t been to before, probably. I still really want to go to India; I’ve never been. Been talking about it forever. Never been to Africa, either, but India is first on my list.

#### OK: Let’s hear about *Housewives*!

I feel so fortunate as an actress of a certain age who still gets to work regularly, and with such a great group of people. Marcia [Cross] and I were already friends [before the series launched]; we were in the same Westside [Los Angeles] circle. When the show came about, I was originally approached for the part of Bree but felt I’d already done something similar. So Marcia asked me if I was up for it and I said: “Be my guest!” She got right up, right there, and called her agent, and landed the part.

#### Were you surprised when Mike married Susan this season?

[Executive Producer] Marc [Cherry] called me two days before we started shooting and said, “I talked to Teri [Hatcher] but I need to tell you: Mike marries Susan!” I was so surprised. But then he said, “And you get to have a nervous breakdown!” I said: “Thank you, Marc! Thank you! Couldn’t be happier!” A nervous breakdown is so much more interesting! Happiness can be pretty boring to play. 🎭