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PHILANTHROPY

Set to Soar

WITH THE COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT, NEW NONPROFIT LEADERS CAN RISE ABOVE CHALLENGES



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

This December marks 10 years since I accepted an offer from then-chairman Bob Puff to relocate my young family from Bakersfield, California to Vero Beach to become CEO of Indian River Community Foundation. At the time, I was in my fifth year leading another well-respected organization

mobilizing philanthropy to meet the needs of a large, rural community that was heavily dependent on the agriculture and energy sectors. I was not looking for a new job; however, the prospect of leading what I learned was one of the fastest-growing new community foundations in the country was appealing. Proximity to the surf

didn't hurt either.

For the most part, I was welcomed into this new community with open arms, both as a business leader and as a husband and father doing my best to help my family thrive in our new hometown. Looking back, I recall many people, from legacy families to transplants like me, who went out of their way to



CONTRIBUTED BY IRCF

IRCF board chair Katy Healy with executive director Jeff Pickering

“Thankfully, we are now in calmer waters, and the school’s future looks bright.”

– STUART HIRSTEIN

offer me support and guidance as a newcomer. It was a risky bet for the Community Foundation’s board of directors to recruit someone with no ties to Vero Beach, but it’s a decision that I believe is paying off. It certainly is for my family and me.

Over the last 10 years, there have been similar leadership changes at several local nonprofit charitable organizations

that Indian River County’s quality of life depends on. As those transitions have occurred, I have tried to pay it forward by welcoming these leaders to their new community and providing the same valuable support and guidance I received. Here are just a few that I am rooting for.

One beloved local nonprofit organization that is succeeding following a

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INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS



COURTESY OF VERO BEACH MUSEUM OF ART

Brady Roberts joined VBMA as executive director in 2016.



KELLY ROGERS

Saint Edward's School welcomed Stuart Hirstein in 2020.

leadership change is the Vero Beach Museum of Art. Brady Roberts began his tenure as the museum's CEO in December 2016, after a national search following Lucinda Gedeon's retirement.

Beyond carrying out the museum's mission and programs while expanding its permanent collection, Roberts faced the challenges of filling several key leadership positions, including chief curator.

Then came the reality check that the museum had outgrown its current 30-year-old building. As a result, Roberts and the board of trustees have embarked on a \$91 million campaign for a campus expansion and renovation that will double gallery space to 22,000 square feet and provide new opportunities for the entire community to become engaged. I am confident that this transformational project



JERRY RABINOWITZ

Rochelle Wolberg has taken the leadership role at McKee Botanical Garden.

will succeed, largely because of the trust and confidence that I, along with many others, have in Brady Roberts.

Another anchor institution that continues to flourish following the retirement of its longtime head is Saint Edward's School. Stuart Hirstein took the helm of the island's college preparatory academy in 2020 as the Pirates were navigating rough seas brought about by a global pandemic.

"That was not the welcome that Mimi and I expected to receive as we arrived in our new hometown," Hirstein reflects. "Thankfully, we are now in calmer waters, and the school's future looks bright."

I agree. With record enroll-

ment, a strong financial position, superlative academic and athletic achievement, and a continued focus on outreach to the broader community, Saint Edward's School and its students are thriving. While it might not always be smooth sailing, under Hirstein's leadership I believe Saint Edward's is on a proper course and due for fair winds and following seas.

In the health care field, the VNA of the Treasure Coast's prognosis is excellent, thanks in large part to the direction of servant-leader Lundy Fields. In six years, Fields has taken the 45-year-old home care provider from a rather fragile financial position to a much more stable one, while improving the organization's

INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS



UP's leader Matt Tanner with development director Jane Snead.

culture and overall quality of care.

With Fields' thoughtful guidance, the VNA has expanded its portfolio of services to include home health, hospice, private care, and community health services. These are provided to insured, underinsured, and uninsured patients alike, making access to health care equal for all members of the community.

Since getting to know Fields primarily through our mutual love of surfing, I have admired his humble approach to his role as the VNA's CEO. It was not until several years after riding waves together that I learned he went back to school to become a certified nursing assistant.

He told me it was so he could volunteer at the VNA Hospice House to better understand what the organization's caregivers' experience at the patient level. With a leadership example like that, I am certainly "on board" in support of the VNA's continued progress.

McKee Botanical Garden is another organization that has undergone a recent leadership change, with Rochelle Wolberg taking the reins from longtime executive director Christine Hobart, who retired at the end of 2023 after 25 successful years in the position. Wolberg's challenge will be to maintain McKee as a historic community treasure while ensuring a vibrant and sustainable future.


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Some of the most precarious leadership transitions within our county's nonprofit sector are at charities that serve the needs of vulnerable individuals and families. With half of our community's residents living either in poverty or one paycheck away from it, newer leaders such as Habitat for Humanity's Trevor Loomis, Hope for Families Center's Marty Mercado, United Against Poverty's Matt Tanner, and Youth Guidance's Phil Barnes have thousands of people depending on them and the organizations they run. So does my grantmaking colleague Meredith Egan, United Way's CEO. Each of them deserves our communi-

ty's support and appreciation for taking care of our neighbors with the greatest needs.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy reports that the average tenure for a fund-development professional is 16 months. Nonprofit CEOs stay in their roles for an average of six years. Considering these statistics, my 10 years as the Community Foundation's president and CEO looks like a bit of an anomaly, but it feels as if I am just getting started.

While I am proud that the Community Foundation's assets have reached \$100 million for the first time in our organization's history under my leadership, I know this milestone results from a team



CONTRIBUTED BY IRCE

Meredith Egan, executive director of United Way, and Dawn Michael.

effort. So does the \$140 million in cumulative grantmaking, reflecting the overwhelming generosity of Community Foundation clients and the wider community. I am fortunate to work for a board of directors made up of engaged and invested leaders who trust my judgment and help me to feel confident while

doing my job.

They say it is lonely at the top, and I believe this maxim is especially true for new leaders. Many of us have stepped into leadership roles of good organizations—in my case one that was off to a really promising start. With a community's unwavering support, we can be great. 🌟

Advice for what matters most, when you need it most

Congratulations to **Nelson Morgan Petersen Wealth Management Group** for being named to the **Forbes "Best-in-State Wealth Management Teams" 2024 list**, published on January 9, 2024. Rankings based on data as of March 31, 2023.



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