



United Way
of Southwest Alabama

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WOMENS INITIATIVE

A NEWSLETTER SUPPORTING UNITED WAY OF SOUTHWEST ALABAMA WOMEN LEADERS.

TRADITIONS OF PHILANTHROPY

written by Jennifer Whiddon [jenniferwhiddon@hotmail.com]

In the last two installments, we've looked at how altruism helps shape and strengthen the bonds of a family. We've also seen how children learn the value of volunteering and giving through early teaching and modeling their parents' examples. But with changing times, how do we approach our young leaders to ensure that philanthropy survives in generations to come?

For philanthropy to prosper in the younger population, we must adapt to the new social and economic dynamics shaping our world today. These dynamics include divorce, single parenting or dual working parents, education, social media and more. With the hectic pace of daily life, when do we teach children about giving back to their community? And will the children retain those values as adults?

Recently, I sat down with three generations of delightful ladies: Mrs. Arlene Mitchell, Mrs. Joy Mitchell Grodnick and Ms. Abby Grodnick, and talked about philanthropy among different generations and their ideas on engaging young leaders in the community.

Mrs. Mitchell, well known for her philanthropy in the Mobile area, grew up in Atlanta where her father taught her firsthand about giving to others. "I believe philanthropy has to be taught, it's not something you're born with," says Mrs. Mitchell, a United Way leadership giver and Women's Initiative member. "We taught our children early on about giving to others and volunteering. And if you start early, it stays with them."

Joy Grodnick, one of four Mitchell children, remembers going with her mother to the Salvation Army and USA Hospital to donate toys to the kids there. As she grew up, Joy witnessed her parents' generosity firsthand all over the city. "My parents were so open that we learned about giving to others through osmosis," she laughs.

To encourage philanthropy among their children, the Mitchells set up a charitable foundation so each child could give in their own way. This effort launched one of many family traditions, ensuring that each generation participated somehow and in some way to give back to their community. Mrs. Mitchell never insisted that her kids do exactly what she did. She only wanted them to do something.

But what happens in a society where there's only one parent or both parents work, and kids spend most

of their time in school and other activities? What is the firsthand lesson about helping others? Maintaining altruistic values in a fast-paced lifestyle can be challenging at best!

"We live in a different environment now, both economically and socially," says Mrs. Mitchell. "And that directly affects how the next generation thinks about community involvement and how they give."

The Mitchell's oldest granddaughter and Joy's daughter Abby Grodnick agrees. "My inspiration to give," she says, "comes from the fact that I have great examples to follow."

So why should we make philanthropy a family tradition? By definition, a family tradition is the super glue that binds one generation to another. Traditions build self confidence and security in children and give them something to look forward to throughout the year.

Abby advocates her grandfather's tradition as a way to keep altruism alive in the family. Growing up Jewish, generosity and giving back to the community became her family's way of life. And every year during the grateful ambiance of Thanksgiving, Mr. Mitchell asked his grandchildren to think about giving back to the community at Hanukah.

"My grandfather asked us to research charities and find one we were particularly passionate about," Abby says. "Then we all sat down and wrote letters to him listing the reasons why we selected that organi-



Arlene Mitchell, Joy Mitchell Grodnick and Abby Grodnick.

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zation and why we wanted to support them.”

“He wanted the children to get personally involved,” says Joy, a United Way leadership giver and Women’s Initiative member. “The main point is to find something you’re passionate about and then

PHOTO BY JENNIFER WHIDDON

Grandmother and granddaughter share a special moment.

children raised money together. When asked if she feels intimidated to follow in her grandfather’s footsteps, Abby says “It’s a responsibility and an honor to pick up where my grandfather left off.”

Reminiscing her granddaughter’s role in the fundraiser, Mrs. Mitchell is noticeably moved, “I’m just so blessed as a parent and grandparent,” she says softly. “Now, despite how different the times are, I’m honored to see my children and grandchildren carry on our family tradition.”

Joy adds, “Continuing the tradition of giving is the ultimate compliment to our family.”

Women, now more than ever, serve as decision makers for their household. They are leaders in the community and providers for their family. United Way Women’s Initiative program provides a way for women to unite in their efforts to give back to their community.

“I see United Way’s Women’s Initiative program as a philanthropic platform for working women to give back to their community,” says Joy. “The program empowers women to give their hard-earned money to a variety of organizations with just one gift.”

Abby smiles, “And empowering women is a wonderful thing.”

From teaching to modeling to instilling traditions, families have the opportunity every day to advocate philanthropy to the next generation. The reality is that each generation grows up in different dynamics and must therefore be approached in different ways. Though the method may vary, giving back to the community is a win-win opportunity for everyone. For the Mitchell family, philanthropy is a passionate tradition that not only connects but particularly bonds each generation to the next.

give to that organization,” she says.

Flexing the philanthropic muscle throughout the generations requires strategy and emphasis on leadership. Joy instilled leadership roles as a requirement at UMS-Wright high school where she served on the school board. “The goal of these activities is to educate and strengthen interest in philanthropy and community involvement in the next generation of leaders.”

The goal seems to be successful. Abby has already participated in her first fundraiser. When her grandfather passed away a few years ago, all the grandchildren renewed their interest in philanthropy by organizing a fundraiser in his honor in New York where Abby worked at the time. They raised over \$100,000 with G. Harvell Clothier at the “Shrimp for Life” fundraiser, a celebration of the southern lifestyle. This marked the first time the grand-



SNAP SHOTS FROM THE 9TH ANNUAL EVENT FOR WOMEN LEADERS HELD SEPTEMBER 2010



BE A SUPER WOMAN

BY BETH MORRISSETTE
2011 UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN CHAIR

PHOTO BY KERRY COHEN

Children from Dearborn YMCA - A United Way agency take time out of their busy schedule to visit with Beth.

Superwoman may be fictional, but there is no doubt what women can accomplish both as individuals and collectively.

According to Giving USA (2010), the largest source of charitable giving comes from individuals, at \$227.41 billion in 2009. We also know that 81% of high net worth donors cite “giving back to the community” as a chief motivation for giving (2008 Bank of America Study of High Net Worth Philanthropy, Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University).

If you examine national statistics on volunteerism and charitable giving and you’ll find that women lead the way. Women volunteer at 29.3% – a full 6% more than men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010) and women in every income bracket give more than men to charity, “women in all income brackets, the lowest to the highest, give nearly twice as much as their male counterparts” (Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 2010).

In 2009, United Way of Southwest Alabama, the Junior League of Mobile, the Mobile Area Education Foundation, the Mobile County Commission, and the University of South Alabama’s Center for Healthy Communities, sponsored a community capacity study, which solicited input from stakeholders including member and non-member agencies and community leaders. Using data from this study, United Way’s Board of Directors adopted a new community impact strategy dedicated to advancing the common good by proactively targeting four Community Building Blocks: Education, Health, Financial Stability, and a strong safety net of Essentials. Through research, we know what is working in this community and what isn’t. We know what challenges our community will have in 5, 10, 15 years and we are using this data and to realign United Way priorities to create a stronger, healthier region.

It’s no understatement to say that things happen in southwest Alabama because of the women who step up to be leadership givers to United Way. Recognized members of United Way’s Women’s Initiative lead our community in so many ways, both as individuals and through their leadership commitments to a myriad of other organizations, both in business, the professions and in the nonprofit sector.

IF INDIVIDUAL GIVING LEADS THE WAY AND WOMEN LEAD INDIVIDUAL GIVING, IMAGINE WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER AS MEMBERS AND AMBASSADORS FOR UNITED WAY’S WOMEN’S INITIATIVE.

So, Superwoman may not be real, but super women are. As a member of the Women’s Initiative, you are SUPER. Thank you for giving so generously to United Way of Southwest Alabama. Thank you for your personal, professional and civic leadership. Please

continue your generosity and good work because more than 125,000 people count on you to make Southwest Alabama a better place to live, work and raise families. Your continued leadership investment in United Way, your participation in the Women’s Initiative and your service as an ambassador to recruit more women who are interested in giving back to the community as members of the Women’s Initiative, can truly improve the quality of life for everyone in our communities.

SAVE THE DATE
10th Annual Event for Women Leaders
August 24, 2011

Additional details to follow.

Created in 2002, United Way Women’s Initiative is made up of women who are committed to making a difference in our community. Together, they advocate, give and volunteer. Women’s Initiative continues to produce impressive results, and members are constantly empowering others to join the effort. The unique group recognizes women who invest in their community through an annual gift of \$1,000 or more or combined gift of \$1,500 or more with their spouse to United Way. Questions? Contact Marlena Himes at 251-431-0134 or e-mail mhimes@uwsa.org GET INVOLVED, TODAY!