

Goddess Of Goodness

Noreen Payne is quietly leaving an indelible footprint in Delray.

She didn't plan it that way.

It just sort of happened - organically.

"I don't like to talk about myself. I was shy growing up, but gradually came out of my shell," said the incoming chair of the Delray Beach Chamber of Commerce.

Like an oyster or a pearl, Payne did more than come out of her shell. She broke the structure. From a lifetime of volunteerism to active roles in non-profit organizations, Payne has changed many lives with her passion and selflessness.

She had good role models. Her mother Kay was an Ambassador for UNICEF and volunteered for organizations that educated and fed children. Her father Riaz was an accomplished electrical engineer (for General Electric) who moved his family around the globe extensively.

They lived in Buffalo, Chicago, New Orleans, Atlanta, London, Germany, South America, the Middle East and other places. She attended three high schools and was often perplexed when people would call her "too tall, too skinny, too quiet, etc."

But those days are over. Payne proudly carries her height, her physique and her station in life. As a matter of fact, she has risen in stature and hierarchy everywhere she goes.

"Noreen always checks in to make sure our program and volunteer needs are being met. She not only delivers meals to homebound clients, but she has arranged to clean up a client's yard, brought her children to help clean and organize a client's home. She is passionate, has integrity, energy and a team player. Our clients are happy to see Noreen - she shares a smile and gives them hugs," said Shona Castillo, Program Director for The Caring Kitchen.

When Payne moved to Delray from Atlanta she took her two children (one strapped to her chest and the other in a stroller) to the Achievement Centers for Children & Families to play with the children. "When they saw us the kids would get so excited and say, 'the babies are coming.'"

Payne does know, however, that helping others is not child's play; it's an important component of life. "You have no idea how many food insecure children there are just blocks away. My passions are hunger, children and helping others."

And helping others she does.

She delivers meals for The Caring Kitchen, provides snacks for children and is involved with Impact 100 Women. She was co-chair for the Achievement Center's recent Annual Delray Beach Home Tour, raising a record-breaking amount of money.

Stephanie Seibel, CEO of Achievement Centers, isn't surprised. "Noreen is one-of-a-kind. She does whatever she can to further a good cause. In one day she may go from sitting at the boardroom table planning an event to sitting on the preschool floor for Delray Reads, planting a garden with our volunteers and delivering

dinner to the homebound."

The wife, mother, volunteer and real estate agent enjoys flying under the radar, which is why she doesn't relish the idea of talking about herself. But, true to her selfless nature, she's compliant to a fault. "I want to show some love for my non-profits - they're amazing and need help."

Helping others is something that tugs on Payne's heartstrings. It's what she was trained to do by familial osmosis, and is something she takes seriously. Her date book is so filled it looks like a daily flight log at JFK, and her days are so structured it would make a free spirit break out in hives.

But her past often inspires her present. "We moved so often that my mother was always calling the Chamber of Commerce in each city. She would call and ask for a doctor, a dentist, a contractor, etc."

That may account for her devotion to the Delray Beach Chamber. She was Ambassador Chair, Vice Chair of Membership, Vice Chair of Programming, Director of the Year and incoming Chairperson.

Though she enjoys anonymity, Jim Chard (Vice Chair of the Chamber) isn't bashful about singing her praises. "Noreen is arguably the hardest working person in Delray. She is one of the best realtors in the City, and still manages the time to be on the board of some of the most significant not-for-profits in the City. As incoming Chair of the Chamber we will surely benefit from her energy, ideas, charm, and ever-present smile."

Payne was a finalist for the Ken Ellingsworth Community Service Award and The Ricard Ohrstrom Community Service Award.

But it's not awards she is seeking. It's about building and serving community. When her husband Lee was transferred to DC, Payne re-created the Delray Beach experience in Round Hill, Virginia. She volunteered for their Home Town Event, adding a Christmas Tree Lighting with Santa, Movies in the Park, food and other fun things. It grew from 12 families participating to hundreds.

Lee Payne took note of her uniqueness at first glance. "When I was working at a bank in Atlanta, this tall blond man walked up to me and asked, 'What are you doing for the next 60 years?'"

Though she was shy and ignored him, karma and happenstance resulted in their union. They have been married 31 years and have two children, 20-year-old Alia and 22-year-old Kamran.

When not making the world a better place Payne can be found selling property. Like volunteering, real estate is part of her heritage. "I always wanted to be in real estate because we moved so often. My mom took me house hunting every time we moved. Memories were created in our homes, and now I can help others do that."

Her friend and partner (from All About Florida Homes Team) Amy Snook fulfills that role with her. "Noreen is more selfless than anyone I've known. She never wants attention for her good deeds and never tells her friends what she does. When I can't find her, it's because she is running food to a child or family in need, helping a veteran, or checking in on an elderly person who doesn't have family. She has the biggest heart."

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