

‘It’s All About Caring For People’

Habitat’s new board chair merges healthcare expertise with a passion for helping people obtain affordable housing

Charlotte Leonard will never forget the first time she attended a Habitat for Humanity groundbreaking.

“It was exciting and amazing,” she says. “You’re watching a family that has given hundreds of hours to help someone else’s home be built now put a shovel in the ground, their ground, for their own home.

“You see their happiness, their tears of joy. It is emotional.”

After years of involvement with [Habitat for Humanity of Greater Palm Beach County](#), Charlotte was recently appointed chair of Habitat’s board directors.

Over the years, she has seen many groundbreakings, but the effect has not worn off. “It drops me every time I attend one of those,” she said.

She also gets a thrill when the home is completed and she watches a family open the door to their new house. “The things we did to help the family get to that point—every paint stroke, every nail pounded—it is so rewarding, so worth it,” she said.

Charlotte believes that her background as a successful healthcare executive helps her understand Habitat’s mission to help people obtain decent, affordable shelter. “It’s all about caring for people,” she said.

“Being an administrator in long-term care it was my job every day to oversee the operation of caring for people, caring for our most vulnerable adults. It was my job to make sure that they received the best possible care.”

Native Floridian Gives Back to Her Community

Charlotte has deep roots in Palm Beach County. She grew up in Pleasant City, the oldest African American neighborhood in West Palm Beach. Her family owned rental properties and several small businesses in the community, including a dry cleaner and a candy store.

“We called it a ‘sweet shop’ and my grandmother ran it her entire life,” she said.

After attending Suncoast High School in Riviera Beach, Charlotte went on to college and earned a degree in healthcare administration. She later obtained a master’s in health law.

One of her first professional jobs was a position with the Palm Glades Girl Scout Council. A few years later she became a licensed nursing home administrator, eventually becoming a regional director responsible for 11 elder-care facilities throughout South Florida.

Today she is owner of [DRIPBaR](#), a wellness company in Royal Palm Beach that specializes in IV vitamin therapy. Charlotte also serves on the city council of Westlake, where she lives. She continues to belong to St. John Missionary Baptist Church in Pleasant City, where her family has worshiped for generations.

Her accomplishments led her to be honored as one of South Florida’s “Most Powerful and Influential Black Leaders in Business.”

For all her boardroom success, she doesn’t mind getting her hands dirty on a Habitat project.

“About a year ago, I had an opportunity to bring employees from work to a Habitat build. We were spreading mulch. I don’t even do this for my own home, by the way. And we were painting and pulling weeds. It was hard work.”

Her co-workers loved it. They told Charlotte that they felt the work they did that day was more important than anything they would have done at the office.

“It is rewarding because you feel you made a difference that day,” she said. “You touched someone. You did God’s work, which is part of the mission of Habitat.”

Soaring Housing Costs Create Need

Charlotte notes that Habitat’s work has become even more important in Palm Beach County in recent years as housing costs have gone through the roof. The average sale price for a single-family home in the county has more than doubled in the last 10 years, going from \$295,000 in 2015 to \$640,000 this year.

“A single working parent—or even a family in which the dad and mom both have good jobs—they just don’t make enough to be able to afford the housing in Palm Beach County,” Charlotte said.

“Habitat makes a difference not only in the lives of those of parents, but in the lives of their kids. We’re allowing those children to know what it is to have a home of their own, to have a front yard, a back yard and to create all those memories that come from growing up in a house.

“It’s life-changing for a lot of families.”

Father Instilled Respect for Veterans

[Veterans Build](#) holds a special place in Charlotte’s heart. It’s one of the annual events held by Habitat for Humanity of Greater Palm Beach County. It is a fundraiser and community build/repair effort that supports veterans and active service members in Palm Beach County.

Charlotte’s father served two combat tours in the Vietnam War. He was hit by shrapnel and to this day still walks with a limp because of the injury. His commendations include a Purple Star and three Bronze Stars.

When he came home as a war hero, but also with something more tangible. His service allowed him to use the GI Bill to purchase their family’s first home. It changed their lives and inspired Charlotte’s work with Habitat.

“While my father was away in the army, we lived with my grandparents in Pleasant City. When he came back I was in middle school and because he served we were able to buy a home and move to Riviera Beach.

“So to me, it all ties in. It’s one big circle. Because he served we were able to get that first home. And now with Habitat, we’re seeing veterans get help with housing, along with the hope and sense of community that comes with it.”

[To find out more about Veterans Build and other Habitat events, *click here.*](#)

Secret Weapon for Energy

With all Charlotte has going on—running a business, serving as a city council member, and her work with Habitat—the obvious question is how she finds the time and energy to do it all.

The trick is to stay organized, she said. And she does it the old fashioned way, by using a paper calendar.

“Everything I do is written in that planner,” she said. “I work from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon, so any meetings I have with Habitat I take in the early morning. Late afternoon, I have the city council meetings.

“It’s a lot, but it is manageable. I’m able to do it because I plan.”

Her husband of 18 years Shack Leonard Jr. marvels at his wife’s ability to juggle so many tasks. In addition to all of her activities, the couple has five children combined.

He once asked her where she got all the energy. Charlotte confessed that she had a secret weapon: B12 shots, which she has taken for years. Charlotte laughs when she recalls the exchange. “He said, ‘I knew you had to be doing something.’”

With DRIPBaR, she also has easy access to IV vitamin therapy, which she believes keeps her healthy and energized.

‘This Is Where I Want to Be’

In her new leadership position at Habitat, Charlotte is hoping others will join her, not only to help families get home to call their own, but to experience the same joy she feels while giving back to the community.

“When I watch a family open that door to their new house, it makes me know that this is the right organization for me. I’m doing the right thing and this is where I want to be.”

[To learn about volunteer opportunities at Habitat for Humanity of Greater Palm Beach County, *click here.*](#)

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