

frontdoors

lifestyle news for arizona's finest

Healthy
Home for
the Holidays
Michelle Robson

Divine Decor
Sixty Years of Sound
Trader Vic's
Polynesian Panache

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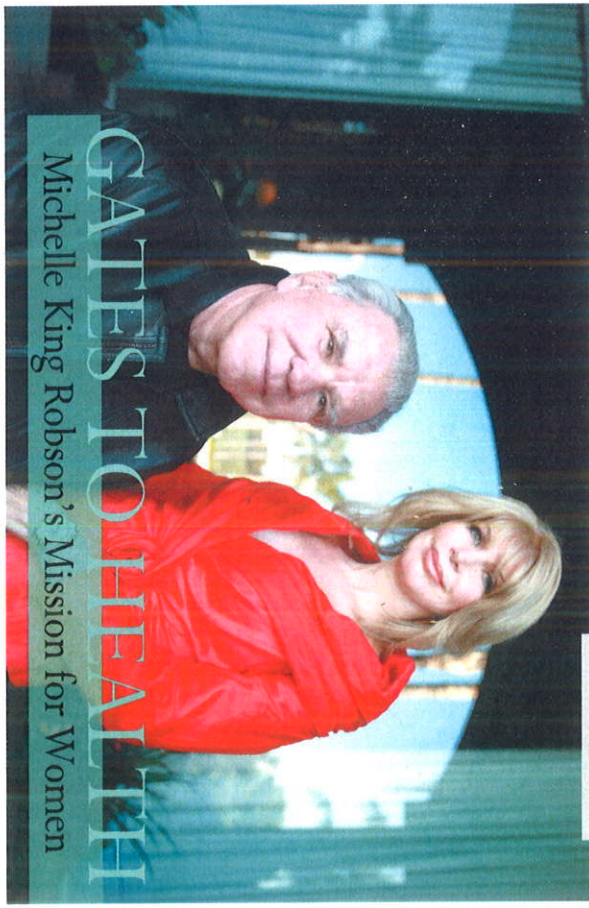
PHOTOS BY J. H. JENNINGS

HEALTHYLIVING

Michelle King Robson has journeyed through her own health-care issues. Deciding that she wanted to share her discoveries and observations about women's health has led her to found Healthy Women Healthy Choices. She shares a few thoughts on how women can take control of their own health care.

- **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Women will spend a tremendous amount of time researching health issues for their children and spouses, but not themselves. "If you are not healthy, you cannot be there for your loved ones," Michelle says.
- **TRACK YOUR MEDICATION.** Many medical treatments have been tested on men and not women. Men's bodies process medications and dosages differently. Add this to the fact that no two women's bodies react the same and there is an inherent problem in understanding dosages. Michelle advises women to track their medications in regards to changes so that they can understand the effects of their medications more fully. Generally, this is done via blood work. Use a journal and write down everything. You may want to include data such as your weight, mental state and energy level. Have this handy when you discuss your health with your physician.
- **"LISTEN TO YOUR ANTENNA,"** says Michelle. "If you took your child, husband or boyfriend to a doctor and did not have a good feeling, you would jump on the phone and find another one!" Do this for yourself, she advises. "Don't settle for just any doctor. Do your research and interview doctors until you find the right fit."
- **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY.** Women often are their own worst enemy. When it comes to health care, Michelle says women often "blame ourselves and don't look for the source, or the root, of why we may not be feeling so well." This can result in ignoring symptoms until there is a real health crisis.
- **WOMEN'S SYMPTOMS ARE DIFFERENT FROM MEN'S.** Women and men can have the same general health issue, but the symptoms can be very different. A heart attack, for example, can manifest itself very differently in males and females. If you suspect a problem, make sure you communicate your symptoms. "Women often downplay their issues, trying not to draw attention to themselves. Do you know how many women having heart attacks are sent home from hospitals with the diagnosis of 'indigestion'?" asks Michelle.
- **LEARN ABOUT COMPOUNDED PHARMACEUTICALS.** This could be the next wave of hormone therapy. Instead of using manufactured and standardized medications, prescriptions are customized by a pharmacist so that there are the appropriate dosages needed for the patient. This is particularly appealing to women who require a variety of hormones at very specific levels.
- **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE RESEARCH.** From books to the web, there is a tremendous amount of information. However, Michelle cautions would-be researchers to determine who has sponsored the research. "People and companies have agendas," she advises. "Make sure to understand who is funding the information provided, whether it's a website or published article."

Healthy Women Healthy Choices
Michelle King Robson
President, CEO
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GATES TO HEALTH

Michelle King Robson's Mission for Women

Michelle enjoys a quiet moment with her husband Ed Robson. Founder and chairman of Robson Communities, Ed shares his wife's passion for philanthropy and community involvement. "Success is not measured by one's bank account," he says, "but by being a good citizen, treating people fairly, and giving back more than you take."

One look at the smiling Michelle King Robson and you would never know that her life has been less than perfect. A prominent Valley philanthropist and community activist, Michelle is equally comfortable in the ballroom or boardroom. She has lent her voice to women's and children's issues, the arts and ethics. Tall, perfectly manicured and dressed to the nines, she looks at you with her large, hazel eyes and you know she speaks from the heart. "There were days when I could not get out of bed," she admits. "I was not able to function and had no idea why my life was falling apart."

In her early forties, Michelle, like so many women, had a hysterectomy. Her physician prescribed a course of hormone therapy, which has become the routine action in American medicine. A dutiful patient, Michelle followed doctor's orders and began taking the prescribed dosage. As her body changed and side effects took place, Michelle chalked it up to stress and possible diet. Weight gain, mood swings and night sweats began to dominate her life. The hysterectomy was supposed to be a positive action toward improving her health. However, it soon became evident that she was not getting better. In fact, she was getting worse. "I talked with my doctor. I talked with other women and I realized that I had to get involved in my own health."

Enter Dr. Elizabeth Lee Viet, from Tucson. Dr. Viet, author of *Screening To Go: Breast, Hormone Combinations, Women Support ... and Doctors Still Ignore* as well as *Women, Weight and Hormones*, seemed to be a bright light in an otherwise dark world. "There was this woman who was writing about my life and she ended up being in Arizona!" recalls Michelle. When the two finally met, Michelle was taking nine different prescriptions, each having its own cause and effect—each trying to solve a problem. "Dr. Viet took me off all the prescriptions and I felt better within 72 hours." Together, doctor and patient decided that Michelle needed to completely share her body of medications so they could see what she really needed. Thus, a

STORY BY JULIA C. PATRICK

new medical journey began. From blood screening to understanding appropriate dosages, Michelle educated herself as to the needs and impact of hormone therapy. She soon discovered that women's medicine was being driven by pharmaceutical companies whose research was becoming the primary source of knowledge. This issue became even more alarming when Michelle learned that there were only a few companies who were setting standards and direction for women's health. "Doctors are so busy, they rely upon the pharmaceutical community to help them keep up with advances in medicine," explains Michelle. Add to this the overwhelming marketing of medicines in print and broadcast, which result in patients going to their health care providers with self diagnosis.

Once she began to share her experiences and new-found discoveries with other women, Michelle was astounded to hear that her own medical crisis was not atypical. "I began to see the connection between women's health and the way women are treated," says Michelle. "As gatekeepers to the family's health, women are generally the last to listen to their own bodies. You would fight for the best care you can get for your daughter, sister or mother, but would you do the same for yourself?"

Marshaling her knowledge of business and philanthropy, Michelle recently formed Healthy Women Healthy Choices. The organization is charged with the mission to "zero in on women's health care" while providing a forum for discussion and exposure. From a message board to a virtual coffee talk, there are resources for women who specifically want to learn more about hormone therapy. Ultimately the organization wants to post clinical trial information, medical resources and data, as well as links to other sites that serve women's health issues.

These are busy days for Michelle. She has completed her own health and is feeling better than ever. "I have learned so much in the process," she says. "Now, it is up to me to share this knowledge so that other women won't have to suffer as I once did." ■