

Susie BOWIE

Executive Director
of the Manatee
Community
Foundation

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arasota and Manatee counties have an abundance of non-profit organizations with diverse missions to raise money and awareness of programs and services

for various causes. Providing a variety of support for these non-profits is one role of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. And the name synonymous with this role and The Giving Challenge is Susie Bowie, the newly appointed Executive Director of the Manatee Community Foundation. After 11 years as Vice-President of Philanthropic Engagement and Marketing at the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Susie assumed her new position in April. If anyone could hit the ground running in this position, it is Susie.

"I gave a great deal of thought to this position before I applied for it. I live in Bradenton. I wanted to make an impact in the community. I had great relationships with the Community Foundation of Sarasota and its network and connections with consultants. Since many non-profits serve both Sarasota and Manatee counties, I saw this position as an opportunity for a leadership role," Susie says. "Manatee County is special. I have met many people who were either born in Bradenton or moved here and earned incomes that allow them to invest in the community. They are deeply proud of the community and therefore, they form the roots of a strong community. I am very fortunate that the Foundation has a storied history and Marilyn Howard, my predecessor, forged many relationships and built a strong foundation. As we move forward, I am looking at new possibilities."

In describing her role at the Foundation, Susie says, "I connect donors who have a passion for Manatee County with opportunities for giving in the community. I determine their motivations, what they care about, and what causes speak to them. I facilitate strategic matchmaking with living doors and charitable legacies so their intentions for giving continues long after they pass. As community foundations evolve, our role is to tap into new donors and help them connect with different kinds of causes since some causes receive more media and social media attention. I spend them with current and potential donors discussing the impact they want to make."

John Annis, Senior Vice President of Community Investment at the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, says, "The short version is that Susie Bowie is the complete package and I think she is absolutely incredible. Susie was already with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County when I came aboard. During our very first team meeting, I remember thinking that she was someone special and that I was going to love working with her. She's not only incredibly intelligent and strategic, she's kind and caring and thorough and committed—and real. Very few people I have met in my professional career are as consistently exceptional at, well, everything. Not long ago, we had our last team meeting. As I was listening to her wrap things up, I remember thinking that she really is someone special."

When asked about her previous work experience in non-profits such as Crowley Museum and Nature Center—a cause close to her heart since her degree is in Environmental Science, she says, "I find working at a non-profit is meaningful as we work for a mission and higher purpose. Every day—even difficult days—you reflect on the reason for the work. It is not

about a paycheck or a building, but about passion. I am fortunate to be in a position where so many missions and people come together to make the world a better place."

The idea of a foundation serving Manatee County was prompted by the possibility of a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation grant and supported by Dorothy (Dot) Ridings, a former Publisher of The Bradenton Herald. Despite the absence of a community foundation in Manatee County, the grant was awarded to the Community Foundation of Sarasota County in 1993 with the intent that the Manatee Community Foundation would receive the funds after it became a non-profit entity.

Ridings and Robert M. Beall II, of Beall's, Inc., formed a committee to investigate the formation of the Manatee Community Foundation with support from the Sarasota foundation. In 1998 the Manatee Community Foundation became a "supporting organization" of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County that holds its assets. Later the Lakewood Ranch Community Fund became a partner to serve the donors of both counties. Housed in a newly-renovated building on Manatee Avenue near downtown Bradenton, the Foundation has three full-time staff members and an operating budget of just under \$500,000. Funding sources include donors, administrative fees, special events, and corporate ambassadors. A recent \$1.2 million capital campaign raised \$800,000 from local individuals.

Susie says, "The Manatee Community Foundation and the community have a long history. We know what works and what doesn't. We want suggestions on how we can be an effective convener on issues that would make Manatee County a more livable community. We want to have people invest their money in non-profits in their own community. Our role is to share community knowledge. It is imperative that we and all non-profits show every donor that they can make an impact. We make it easy by helping people decide when to give, what to give, and what kind of fund to establish. Anyone can make an impact on an organization whose mission matches their passion. Even small amounts can make an impact."

Anyone who knows Susie is aware that she is a master at connecting people. She is professional, patient, sensitive, and determined. The kindness of others is her daily motivation. Her joy comes from seeing a donor's pride in what they funded in the community. Frustration sets in when people and organizations cannot work together. She says ego in philanthropy gets in the way of accomplishing what donors want to do with their money. In addition to donor-advised funds, the Foundation has a competitive grant cycle and also awards scholarships to high school students and adults.

Susie was born in Lumberton, North Carolina, and moved to Sarasota in her senior year of high school. Her father was Vice President of Tropicana. Her husband Larry is in sales with Ecolab. She has one adult stepson in Bradenton. Photography, kayaking, visiting Robinson Preserve, and traveling to quirky places in Florida fill her leisure time. She is also a huge U2 fan and has seen concerts all over the United States.

Even though there is a void at the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Susie and her talents, approachability, and intelligence are only a short drive away. 🍷

STORY: Carol Darling

IMAGES: Evelyn England