

BUSINESS PROFILE

Where East meets philanthropy

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@florida-weekly.com

Julia East has a manner that can be professional yet warm, down-to-earth without making it seem affected. A considerate, helpful person. It's an impression heightened by a self-effacing ability to correct herself grammatically. And also of course because of her job.

"The world of philanthropy has changed significantly - even in the last couple years," she said.

Part of East's role as President of The Southwest Florida Community Foundation, a sort of local philanthropic comptroller, is to stay abreast of the changes. It is also to corral that human giving instinct some people find in themselves - and all the funds that go along with that - to best serve the communities needs.

"We're very diligent about making sure we adhere to donor's wishes," she said.

There are a plethora of ways to donate to the Community Foundation, but why bother? What would the community be missing out on if this foundation had not been formed in 1976, with a \$500 donation from First National Bank?

"You mean besides the \$30 million pumped back into the community in grants and scholarships in the last 30 years?" East asked.

But it's not just about giving away money; it's about giving it away intelligently. Some people know they want to donate money for something, East said, but they aren't sure what for. That's what she's for, partly, to provide an option besides just randomly

handing out donations curbside (like the quirky, fictional do-gooders did in Dave Egger's novel, "You Shall Know Our Velocity").

Since coming to the Community Foundation in 2004 as Chief Development Officer (then as Vice President, then chosen by her 10-member board last year as President) East has identified a number of places funds are needed. She did it with the help of her board members.

"While I am President and CEO of the Community Foundation, there is a very committed, intelligent board of trustees that work hard for this organization," East said. "And they are the one's that set the vision and policies for this organization, and it's my job to see that vision is implemented."

The board identifies areas where money helps - not only for student scholarships or grants but also to shore-up the lack of mental health care services in Lee County; or to provide food for the non-profit Harry Chapin Food Bank; or help Southwest Florida's drug and alcohol addicted citizens. The Foundation also acts as a community savings account to help with emergencies such as hurricane clean-up. These are only a few options for those who have philanthropic energy they don't know what to do with.

"(Without the Community Foundation), you wouldn't have a repository of endowed funds, to serve the needs of the community," she said. "...It's really fun to sit down with someone who wants to do something but they don't know quite how to do it."

How you give, she said depends on per-



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO

Julia East

sonal preference, but to her charitable giving lends itself well to our countries historical philosophy, "By the people, for the people." It neatly describes how the Community Foundation was created and who it serves. It is also a continuation of the attitudes East recalls from her childhood, when philanthropy simply meant being a helpful person, and we're all in it together.

"I remember growing up seeing my parents or grandparents or other's in the community," she said. "Everybody pitched in their time or money and no one expected to receive a reduction on their taxes...they just took care of each other. That's just what they did. It's a part of our American culture."

East grew up on a 350-acre rural plot of

land in Virginia with two brothers, all close in age.

"So there was always, 'I can do what the boys can do,'" she said.

East built fences and planted trees.

"The first thing I learned how to drive was a tractor," she said.

She spent 20 years making similar decisions with a non-profit she founded, in Pennsylvania, before moving to the Community Foundation. But her entire life hasn't been given away to philanthropy. She also teaches graduate students, and was once a lifeguard, worked for a steel manufacturing company and waited tables at a diner, for one summer maybe two or three decades ago. That one wasn't for her.

"And I gotta tell you, I'm not a good waitress," East said. "For one thing, I'm too social...I would get into a long-winded conversation with one table and not make it to the next one."

Her education includes a Bachelor of Science in Computer Application Information Systems, a Master of Science in Communications from Clarian University in Pennsylvania and a Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership from the University of Phoenix.

East said she traveled to West Palm Beach and Naples as a child, and before even having a job in Fort Myers, planned to live here permanently. She moved here with her family about 5 and a half years ago.

"I really fell in love with this area," she said. "And part of that is that it has a small town feel and big town amenities...I'm blessed that things have worked out." ■

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