



PROFILE:

Patricia Glaser Shea

President and CEO of the YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee

BY BROOKE TERRY

Patricia Glaser Shea's day begins at 5:45 a.m., lifting weights and walking with a friend at the gym. On the way to her office, she makes her ritual morning stop for hazelnut coffee at Panera Bread before arriving at her office by 8 a.m. As president and CEO of the YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, her days can be both totally unpredictable and very rewarding.

Glaser meets with her staff members from finance, development, program management and pr/marketing, before getting on the phone with current and potential volunteers. These are often women who've recently lost jobs or are looking for a place to find their voices. Later, she drives to a business lunch while on her cell phone with donors. Afterwards, she makes a public presentation about the YWCA and its services to an executive audience. As the afternoon comes to a close, she reviews grant proposals and contracts, while signing thank-you notes to sponsors and in-kind donors. Then it's out the door to attend an evening cocktail event to network the YWCA's mission, before returning home at about 7 p.m.

After helping many women during the day, Shea looks forward to having dinner with her son Zachary and husband John. Before bed, she'll feed her dog, catch up on emails and read a few pages of a book or newspaper.

A Wheeling, W.Va., native, Shea is one of eight children. She graduated with a degree in business administration from the University of Dayton in Ohio, but has called Nashville home for 25 years. Fifteen years in the healthcare industry preceded her leap to the non-profit sector 10 years ago.

As CEO, Shea reports to the chair of the YWCA Board of Directors. In addition to managing the organization's operations and annual financial goals, she's responsible for the strategic planning, relationship building, development and fundraising for the YWCA. A recent accolade came in

2009, as the YWCA raised enough money to pay off the mortgage of the YWCA Weaver Domestic Violence Center.

As a community spokesperson and advocate for women, Shea says divine intervention must have brought her to this position. While sitting on the board of another non-profit, she was recruited to work in its development division. The opportunity allowed her to stay close to home with her son, reducing the rigorous travel she'd been used to in the healthcare industry. When the YWCA CEO position became available, she jumped at the opportunity, since she'd volunteered there in her early 20s.

Besides shelter, the YW has programs including GED for men and women, a women's prison program, girls' mentoring and an elder abuse prevention program. Shea appreciates hearing the success stories of women who have overcome barriers, as well as experiencing the generosity of so many Nashvillians who support the YWCA. The most difficult part, she says, is the inability to reach everyone who needs the YWCA's services.

According to the non-profit's statistics, one in three women will experience domestic violence at some time during her life. Last year, the YWCA's Weaver Domestic Violence Center provided more than 14,000 emergency shelter nights to women and children and was full 311 days, making it necessary to turn others away. They answered more than 2,500 crisis calls and are able to handle more, even when the center is full.

The need for safe shelter is critical. In 2008, 12 percent of Nashville's homicides were domestic violence-related. Since January, there have been four confirmed domestic violence-related murders in Nashville.

Non-profit work isn't easy, but it can be very rewarding. Shea says if you're considering this line of work, you should have a passion for a cause and want to align yourself with the non-profit's mission. She suggests investigating the

organization and potential job responsibilities very closely before you decide, and says volunteering is a great way to do this. She also suggests charities should treat their work as if it were a for-profit business.

“I’m at the YWCA because of our mission, but every day I’m focused on the quality of our services, the clarity of our public messages and our bottom line,” says Shea. “In leading a charity, I’ve found there’s as much rigor—with less certainty—than in my for-profit leadership years.”

If she weren’t in non-profit, Shea says she’d pursue public speaking, especially on subjects she’s passionate about. She enjoys working on things she believes are just and right. She genuinely loves to help women improve their lives and be healthier and happier people.

When not working, Shea spends time with family, and she loves to travel, exercise, find great restaurants and talk with good friends. But at the end of the day, she just loves helping women. Each time she meets a client, she thinks to herself “that could be me.”

She says her parents raised their children to be loving, pursue an education and work hard, but unfortunately, many deserving individuals aren’t so fortunate.

“Sometimes people just deserve an opportunity—a little help—to improve their circumstances. That’s what we do at the YWCA. When you help a woman, you also help her family—especially her children. Teach a woman to fish and she feeds the village.”

The YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all. For more information about the YWCA and its services, call (615) 269-9922 or visit ywcanashville.com. The crisis hotline is (615) 242-1199.