

In 1998, Diana Lewis and longtime friend Linetta Gilbert walked into the newly formed Ashé Cultural Arts Center. Diana was inspired to hear the founders speak of their mission, but she left with one nagging question: how were they going to accommodate visitors or volunteers without any tables or chairs?

“How can we help?” she asked Linetta.

Within a week, Diana had encouraged a local bank to donate the necessary furniture, and she followed up with a grant of her own.

*How can we help?* Interesting how one simple question can paint the picture of a woman.

Described as a “consummately organized” and dedicated volunteer who knows how to get things done, Diana Lewis’s lifetime of public service spans five decades. In that time she has filled her famously busy days working with too many local organizations to count, including serving as the first female Chairman of both the United Way of Southeast Louisiana and the Greater New Orleans Foundation. Though Diana downplays its significance, this notable feat laid the groundwork for the accomplished women who would follow in her footsteps.

As Chairman of GNOF, Diana proved herself to be not only inquisitive about the issues facing our region, but also committed to addressing the root causes behind them. She believed that all our city’s residents deserved a better quality of life, and she knew that this required stability in families, homes, and neighborhoods.

During her time at GNOF, Diana demonstrated a deep commitment to community revitalization and affordable housing. This is perhaps best exemplified by her Herculean efforts to bring the Local Initiatives Support Corporation to New Orleans. Attracting this national organization that supports community development

projects required not only a ton of time and research, but also raising the requisite one million dollars in local private funding to qualify for an equal matching grant.

Diana's passion continues through her service today. She knows there is always more work to be done, more help to give.

*How can we help?*

When it comes to Diana Lewis, the word "we" is of equal or greater importance than the word "help", if you can believe it. For Diana, it's all about the "we", the "us". She dreams modestly for herself – a Saturday spent in the garden or a dinner surrounded by family. But Diana has big dreams for New Orleans. She envisions a city where every family has access to an affordable home and every child access to a good education. She envisions a fair and equitable community, where benefiting one benefits all.

Diana also believes in the power of "we" to make that dream a reality. She is quick to attribute her success to the contributions and support of others, and those who have worked closely with Diana describe her collaborative spirit and her ability to bring out the best in others as some of her greatest superpowers. While Diana is confident in her own abilities, she's the first to acknowledge her limits, and she has a knack for spotting and empowering the greatness in those around her. Checking self-interest at the door, Diana defies traditional boundaries of age, gender, race, and religion to bring people together and produce great outcomes.

Diana – you can point your finger elsewhere, but we know all that you've done for GNOF and the community it serves, and we thank you for your never-ending dedication to and compassion for others.