

As a young girl growing up in Abbeville, Louisiana, Phyllis Taylor knew in her heart that a mistake had been made: she'd been born in a small town 150 miles from the bustling metropolis where she belonged. Many years later, when she arrived at Tulane Law School—one of just three women in her class—this self-described “city girl” knew she was finally home.

For two decades, New Orleans was Phyllis's dream, but for the five decades since, Phyllis has been nothing short of a dream for New Orleans.

Across both business and philanthropy, Phyllis's impact on this city is truly remarkable. She proudly shares this legacy with her late husband, Patrick, but no one who knows Phyllis well would describe her as a silent or hands-off spectator to Patrick's initiatives. Quite the opposite. They describe her as feisty and kind, strong and sophisticated, a great listener with boundless energy, an adventurous game hunter, and a skilled slots-player. They admire how Phyllis has actively devoted her time, effort, money, and personal passion to a wide array of causes—the arts, religion, housing, military, and the cause nearest to Phyllis's own heart, education.

Like the city it serves, the Greater New Orleans Foundation was another dream of Phyllis's. As you can imagine, legendary philanthropists like Phyllis are inundated with requests to donate and to serve. But Phyllis admits that GNOF is one call she eagerly awaited. She knew that serving on the GNOF board would provide true insight into the in's and out's of philanthropy in New Orleans—the causes, the donors, the do's and don'ts of creating positive change in our region.

But she couldn't have anticipated just how much change New Orleans and its neighbors would face during her years on the board: first Hurricane Katrina, then Hurricane Rita, then the BP oil spill. Through all of it, Phyllis persevered. Her commitment to New Orleans never wavered, and she continued to believe—perhaps more than ever before—that New Orleans, “warts and all”, is a city with unparalleled charm and potential, no matter what the world throws its way.

Phyllis's strength of character and conviction are complemented by what she considers to be her most important trait: an enduring childlike wonder in the world and its many gifts. Her gratitude, humility, and sincerity run deep, and they not only drive Phyllis's desire to give back, but also explain why she is one of the most admired and awarded philanthropists we know.

Phyllis's big picture optimism has greatly benefited the Greater New Orleans Foundation, most recently with her vision for our new, beautiful Center for Philanthropy. Phyllis led the charge to acquire the property, raise the necessary funds, and knock on a whole lot of doors. Most importantly, Phyllis helped others to understand how a visible presence in our community would not only benefit our organization, but would also benefit our donors, grantees, and partners—and how right she was.

Phyllis, you've always been a visionary and a dreamer, beginning with your childhood belief that you were meant to be a New Orleanian—and on that front, we couldn't agree more! Your contributions to this city—the big and the small, the prominent and the quiet, the tangible and the intangible—are impossible to count or quantify, and we are so very grateful for all that you've given of yourself.