



# Community Kinswoman

If you think globally, and act locally, the chances are pretty good that you have already met the feather in the hat of the Women's Foundation

**Who would you trust with your personal fortune?** She would have to be a person with impeccable character and integrity, someone you knew gave excellent investment advice. You would recognize her deep intellect, but find her gracious during business dealings.

This is Deborah Gandy, 53, of Great Falls, the director of Citi Private Bank, where she manages clients whose wealth exceeds \$25 million. Now, she's turning her talents to chairing the Washington Area Women's Foundation.

A single mother of two grown children, Gandy leads the region's philanthropic causes on many national and local stages—from DC Cares to Goodwill Industries to her position as vice chair of Arlington's Signature Theatre.

**What are your roots in philanthropy?**

It actually started when I was young. My mom always believed in giving back. Most of that came through the church. I am Episcopalian, and our church was very reactive in the elderly community. Things like Meals On Wheels. It was a big deal to be in the church, prepare meals, deliver meals out. So watching her do things like that made giving back start very young.

**Your mom is very important influence in your life?**

She believed in the importance of the tithe, which is to give 10 percent of

your earnings to the church, and that you never, ever look down on anyone. She was always very kind to people. When we would go places, it didn't matter whether it was the bellhop or the hotel manager, she always had a kind word for everyone. She would say to me, 'Never look down on anyone, and don't discount anyone. Everyone has a place and a value.'

**What was the most meaningful time you had in your years as a community servant?**

You may remember years ago, when there were African-American churches that seemed to mysteriously burn down in the Deep South. There was a mission to go to rebuild some of those churches, and I chose

to go down. Places like Alabama and Mississippi that, growing up as an African-American, you always hear are very prejudicial. Plus, there were rumors that the burnings had been racially motivated. But I just knew I needed to rebuild those churches. So I went down with 20 other members of my church.

Those two weeks were unbelievable for me, living in meager means; a military barrack with a mess hall. Everyone came together; I met some of the most wonderful people in the world.

That prejudicial image I had was gone. It was also a point in my life when I realized you can really make a difference in somebody's life by taking action.

**How did you personally first become involved with the Women's Foundation?**

In 2000, the president of the Women's Foundation came to me when I worked at U.S. Trust. She told me about some of the things the Foundation was doing.

I was unbelievably intrigued by the powerful impact this organization was having, changing the lives of women and girls in this area. When I looked at the milestones they had achieved and their goals, it wasn't conceivable to me that you could do that without an army of people.

What I found was a workhorse and a very lean organization. Their formula was partnering with not-for-profits who had the same goals as the Women's Foundation.

Our focus is on women and girls who basically live below the poverty line, and doing what's necessary to raise them up above the poverty line. We have 100 not-for-profit grantee partners that we work with in order to accomplish that mission.

**Currently, you serve as the organization's chair?**

It was an easy yes. At first, it was being part of a luncheon for women

in the region, giving them an update on the state of women and girls in the area, and to bring an inspirational message.

One thing in the research that is very clear, when you invest in women and girls, you really are investing in improving that community, raising that community up.

The second part of what we do is teaching philanthropy. Washington is an area of great wealth, but the shocking discovery of our 2003 research was that 30 percent of women-headed households in the

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region are below the poverty line. That's one in every 10 girls living below the poverty line here.

You find yourself saying, How can we be in such means and have that statistic in our area?

**How is the Women's Foundation different?**

We focus and invest resources into women and girls in the community. At our 2001 luncheon, we had 250 people in the room. In 2007, we had 1,500. Ten years ago, our first grants were \$30,000, and now we're giving back over a million.

The Women's Foundation offers the opportunity to get involved in whatever level is best for them.

Philanthropy can be time and talent, where you can volunteer with a grantee partner.

Or you can write a check that says, 'Your message has touched me.' You can do both, which a lot of women have chosen to do.

It is a way of getting women leaders together—not just business women, but women who are philanthropic, to give back to their community.

**Are there any community men involved?**

Yes, we call them 'men who get it.' There are men who say, 'We're interested in giving back to the Women's Foundation because we have daughters, and we want them to understand the importance of philanthropy.' They understand the value of a woman's strength.

**Do you feel that the citizens of this particular region, Northern Virginians, are unusually charitable?**

Absolutely. I live in Great Falls. There is significant wealth in Northern Virginia, but unfortunately there's also poverty.

We have grantee partners in Northern Virginia with efforts directed at single women-headed households. Doorways in Arlington is a program that focuses on financial independence, teaching women to save, budget and get out of debt. Northern Virginia Family Service's (program) Training Futures helps women in dead-end jobs. They provide job training to increase wages and give women greater confidence in their skills. It has a high success rate. A waitress making five bucks an hour, not enough to pay rent or put food on the table, went through the program and came out with a job paying \$60,000 a year.

**Would you say that the Women's Foundation keeps a low regional profile?**

Getting the message out is critically important to us. If there is a woman in need, we want to be there.

Poverty doesn't know district lines. We pay attention to the Asian and Latino communities. There is a huge need in Loudoun County and parts of Fairfax and Arlington. We look for grantee partners that reach the need.

**How do you believe your children to view your active involvement in philanthropy?**

You're not always sure that what you say resonates. But it's not by word, it's by doing. My kids saw me volunteering. They know about giving back to my church.

This year I said, You don't need anything for Christmas. So what you were going to get, let's give to a child in need.

I don't get any back talk. They understand, and they do their own research for their gifts.

They get that from the home. Our generation has done a great job preparing the next generation for giving back, and the schools are helping by requiring community service.

**How do you strive to strike a healthy balance with your home life and your career?**

You only have that child for 18 years. That's a short span, and it's your responsibility to mold, craft, to do your part in raising that child by staying involved in their education, getting involved in their activities, helping them volunteer in their community.

I made a commitment to my kids that I would be at the dinner table at least three nights each week. You have to talk to them and engage them while you're at the table.

Being a single mom, we were trying to be in many places at the same time. People asked me, 'How do you do it?'

You just do what's necessary for your children. Technology gives you more flexibility. Your weekends are your kids, and you can't forget the fun. There's no manual out there. It's hindsight, but so far things are going well. 🐾

# Shohreh Sharif, DDS

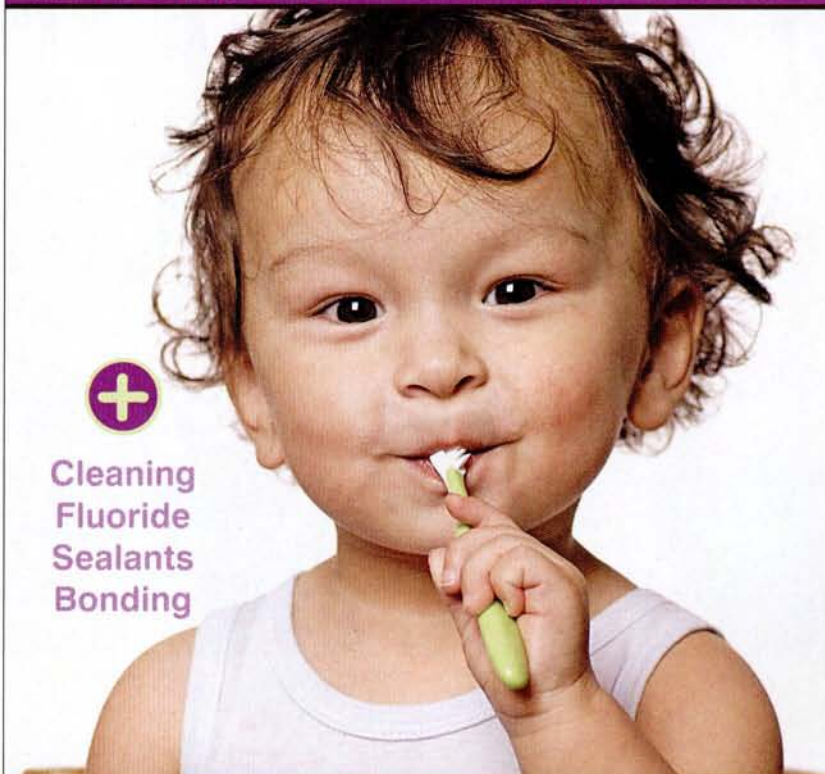
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