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FAMILIAR FACES: Dianna Sutton masters art of management

By Timothy O'Hara Key West Citizen

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Dianna Sutton has worked with the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys since 2004.

Dianna Sutton's journey to become the head of one of the Florida Keys' most giving and successful non-profit groups was not a typical career trek.

Sutton, a native Floridian, grew up as an artist and traveled to Colorado to study art in college. She was among a group of artists on the fair circuit, selling her wares at various craft shows and festivals.

She eventually realized she was "better at managing the business than providing a product for sale," Sutton said, adding, "I fell into nonprofit management through an arts and crafts co-op and learned it firsthand."

After graduating from the University of Colorado at Denver, she remained in Colorado for 28 years, pursuing a career in nonprofit management. She worked for the top two cultural nonprofit groups in Denver before becoming the head of the Yampa Valley Community Foundation in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Along the way she earned a master's degree in communications from the University of Northern Colorado.

Sutton spent eight years in Steamboat Springs before being lured to Key West to oversee the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, which was started by several local community leaders and philanthropists in 1996 and had reached a critical juncture about its future.

Sutton announced last week that she will retire by the end of the year as president and chief executive officer of the foundation, leaving the group far stronger than when she started.

Sutton, a nationally certified fund-raising executive, took the foundation from an upstart non-profit group to one of the most giving charities in the Keys. Under Sutton's leadership, the foundation's assets have grown substantially from \$4 million to \$20 million today.

The group has achieved national recognition as a top grantor and received accreditation among U.S. community foundations.

Sutton will assist the foundation through the transition to its next leader.

Under Sutton's leadership, the foundation has facilitated more than \$34 million in charitable donations and an estimated \$50 million more has been pledged for the future as legacy gifts, according to the Community Foundation.

The foundation has awarded \$29 million in grants to local nonprofits, scholarships and program services, propelling the organization into the top 5 percent of community foundations nationally for active grant making per capita.

The grant funding, which has assisted thousands of residents from Key West to Key Largo, includes funds for vital disaster recovery aid through two major disaster relief initiatives following Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

With Sutton's vision and guidance, the foundation created the Center for Nonprofit Leadership, a virtual hub of programs, services and resources for nonprofits. She co-created the Leadership Success Academy board training program, equipping more than 450 volunteer board members throughout Monroe County with nonprofit best practices procedures.

"For 15 years, Dianna Sutton has provided exemplary leadership and has applied her outstanding skills, considerable professional experience and extensive fundraising expertise to make an incredible difference here in the Keys," says Ron Burd, foundation board chair. "She has grown the organization into a stable, vital community asset and has positioned the foundation very well for the future."

Sutton says she is ready for her next adventure and chapter of her life, which comes down to "friends, family, fun, laughter and love," she said.

"It will be less about a place and more about the experience," Sutton said. "I still want to stay active. I am life-long learner.

"I will always consider myself an artist."

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