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Familiar Faces: New CFFK leader McComb has big shoes to fill

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September 3, 2019



Jennifer McComb plans to continue to make a difference in the lives of Monroe County residents as the new head of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys. (JILL ZIMA BORSKI/The Citizen)

Several factors have helped shape Jennifer McComb's life, including family ties and hard work. Named the new president and CEO of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, McComb has made a difference throughout the Keys during her career, and plans to continue to do so as head of CFFK's administrative, fundraising and community leadership and outreach efforts, starting Sept. 30.

Her career path led her to the CEO position, she said, and she is very happy, while acknowledging it is a huge responsibility to replace longtime leader Dianna Sutton, who retires in November. Among McComb's tasks, as outlined in the agency's strategic Vision 20/20 plan, is expanding outreach and continued development efforts in the Middle and Upper Keys. She said she wants to build awareness of the foundation's efforts and serve the entire Keys.

On April 11, McComb was the first to call about the president's position. With the hometown advantage as a Keys resident, she won out over 40 other applicants. She has worked as executive director of the Good Health Clinic, as well as director of operations at United Way of the Florida Keys.

Since 2017, as chief development officer of the Florida Keys Children's Shelter, she has managed fundraising efforts and a \$2.5 million budget. She said she likes being out and about as part of her job, allowing to meet and know many people throughout the Keys. Her work has included planning the annual Mayor's Ball in Key West. She is planning her third one, set for Jan. 11, and she will be able to attend it.

Although McComb grew up in Los Altos, California, she has been visiting the Keys her whole life. Her grandparents had a home in Key Colony Beach. She said she was shown strong moral principles from her mother, who refused to set foot in Florida since it never ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, which states civil rights may not be denied on the basis of gender.

McComb graduated from Cornell University and earned her master's degree in direct marketing from Northwestern University. Since 2011, she has lived in the Keys full-time. Once here, her first job involved commuting from Key Largo to Florida International University in Miami, where she worked for a year as a development director. Before that, she worked in real estate in Orlando and volunteered at nonprofit organizations. A close friend told her that she seemed happiest when she was fundraising for nonprofits, and that started her thinking about the similarities between sales and fundraising. She saw that matching a seller and a buyer was similar to matching a donor with a cause ... and it was something she did well.

Perhaps the work that most prepared McComb for her new position was operating the All Charities event at the Ocean Reef Foundation. "It took all year to plan it," she said of the event. The first year she organized it, the event raised \$5 million for non-profits throughout South Florida. The next year, it raised \$7 million.

McComb is visible at community service events, too. As president of the Rotary Club of Key Largo, McComb helped found the Key Largo Sunset Rotary, which meets twice a month on Wednesday evenings. Its focus is serving the community. On her agenda last week was hosting an ice cream social with residents at the Plantation Key Nursing Center. McComb said a monthly service project is part of the group's outreach.

Another gratifying aspect of McComb's community service is mentoring a Take Stock in Children scholarship recipient. "Rachel" is in her final year at Coral Shores High School and wants to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While McComb does not have children, she said she enjoys her time with her "mentee" and wants to find out "the rest of her story" as Rachel heads toward graduation.

"I've learned as much from her as she's learned from me," said McComb. "Rachel makes me feel both young and old at the same time. With all she is doing ... classes, band, performing in musicals, working 30 hours a week – she inspires me."

Among the changes McComb faces is moving to Key West for her new position. She is excited about that, as she loves the southernmost island. She'll bring her two dogs, a Labrador retriever who is a national dock diving champion, and a mixed breed adopted from MarrVelous Pet Rescues.

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