

A sixth generation New Yorker born in Manhattan, Toni comes from a long line of people for whom philanthropy was just generosity and that was just a way of life. “There, but for the Grace of God, go I” was as much a part of her upbringing as “Finish your spinach – think of the starving Armenians!”

Educated at the Brearley School and Vassar College, Toni married a native of La Grange Park, and moved to the western suburbs where they raised three children. All three forged careers in nonprofit enterprises and Toni’s six grandchildren are active in philanthropic causes.

The suburbs eventually proved too much of a disjunct for her New York DNA and Toni moved into the City where she got a job as Receptionist for an executive recruiting firm, Spencer Stuart. Four years later she became the first female consultant on the staff and within 10 years was the first female partner.

Not surprisingly, given her DNA, she soon gravitated to the nonprofit clients and recognized that there was a huge market in that sector. She convinced her firm to let her create a ‘specialty nonprofit practice’ (the first for a large recruiting firm) which she headed for the balance of her 30 year career. She worked primarily with Boards seeking new leadership for nonprofits throughout the country and beyond. Some were large and traditional (museums, major orchestras, large foundations); others were smaller (human service and civic organizations); some were idiosyncratic (like Executive Women in State Government). Many of the leading cultural and civic organizations in Chicago in the 1980s and 1990s were led by Smith recruits (and some still are).

Toni had limited ‘free’ time while working, but she served on the Chicago Botanic Garden and Associated Colleges of Illinois boards and on advisory boards for the National Easter Seal Society and Northwestern University’s non-degreed nonprofit course program. She became a member of The Chicago Network where she has been a Board member and committee chair. When she retired, wanting to be more involved with the City and its residents, she joined the boards of Lakefront SRO and a children and family agency that has grown to become One Hope United. She also joined Executive Service Corps of Chicago as a volunteer consultant (she recently chaired that board) and volunteered at her neighborhood Lakeview Pantry. Because of a lifelong interest in archeology, she became a docent at the Oriental Institute and, later, a member of the Visiting Committee. And love of theater led her to Steppenwolf where she has chaired their Directors Circle committee.

Still active with most of these organizations today, Toni now lives at The Admiral, a north side senior residence. She chairs their Lifelong Learning Committee, bringing outside speakers and university courses to the building, and is currently serving on the Executive Committee of the Residents Board.

Because of her years of work with Boards and CEOs, she developed an expertise in nonprofit governance and has used that to chair boards and governance committees wherever she has served. Her goal as a recruiter was to recruit CEOs who could help nonprofits grow and thrive; she now tries to use her own experience toward the same goal. Toni is still the go-to person for people transitioning in their careers or from full time work to retirement—which she insists is really just reWIREment.