

Heroes Among Us - Karon Sullivant

You would never know by her love of Gainesville today that our Hero Among Us came here kicking and screaming in the 60's fearing that her life was over. When she married her husband, Larry, they settled in the Arlington/Fort Worth area. She had no idea that Larry was thinking about returning to Gainesville. We are thankful they did as our hero, Karon Sullivant, has had an extraordinary life of teaching and giving back.

Karon and Larry met at Baylor. She was in education, he in law school. Larry said to her "someday I want some championship horses" which to her meant "when we get old..." Then one day he came home and said "I want to look out the window and know everyone that walks by." The result was a law practice in Gainesville and life spent in the horse industry in Cooke County.

Karon began as a teacher in Gainesville and was forced to retire during her pregnancy with her son (as was required at the time.) She fully intended to return to teaching when her son began school but by then their horse business was growing and she realized that someone with a vested interest needed to run it. It was to be her, as Larry was active in his law practice.

But what did she really know about horses? Karon took clinics at Texas A&M and worked closely with the vet that came to the breeding barn every other day. The vet explained everything and she took notes. It was a busy year. The results speak for themselves with Sullivant Ranch Quarter Horses producing 21 world champion horses and this with Larry maintaining a full time legal practice.

In those early years, their vibrant horse business included lots of traveling on weekends and some holidays. Their son was young when the nation celebrated its Bicentennial. It was very important that she pause their hectic life to recognize and teach him the importance of Independence Day and the freedoms we are so blessed to have. So that year began the tradition of softball games, homemade ice cream and fireworks. Each year the event grew larger, as there were no firework displays in the area at that time. They soon noticed cars parked up and down the road to watch. It gave them much pleasure to provide something the community could enjoy for over 20 years.

After some time Karon realized the only people she saw outside of the horse industry were at church and Tom Thumb. She needed a little more in her life. So began her passion for community service. Dr. Bud Joiner was President when she was elected to serve on the NCTC Board of Regents, the first woman to do so. She served for 18 years and also served on the Equine Advisory Board. Dr. Wallace and Lisa Bellows continue to embrace and encourage the equine program today. Recently, students won three national championships, competing against four-year universities including Texas Tech and Texas A&M.

Karon was also a leader in the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, invited to serve by Ben Hatcher. In 1989, she was instrumental in launching Leadership Gainesville. The first year was a big success and many coached them not to offer it every year as "there just are not enough people in Gainesville for it." Leadership Gainesville just celebrated its 30th anniversary and Karon is very proud that it continues to be an integral part of developing today's community leaders.

As you can imagine, Karon has served and influenced many organizations throughout the years. Recently, she was asked to help chair the capital campaign to build a shelter for Abigail Arms. She had never done a campaign like that before but she felt a tap on her shoulder saying she needed to do this. She helped organize presentations and people came out in droves to help. The chair members made a

decision not to borrow money for the project. They raised \$2 million in cash and in kind, received a grant from the Meadows Foundation and were able to open the facility debt-free. On June 1, 2019, the shelter celebrated its fifth anniversary. Last year alone they served 1,200 people of which 700 were children, the innocent bystanders of abuse. The need continues to grow. If you ask Karon she will say that her life has been enriched just by being a part.

I think this is the lesson Karon, the teacher, teaches us that community service is important. You are never too old to help someone or to share God's love. And when you do, you may find you enrich your life even more than those you help. You see, Karon sees life through the eyes of a horse on a race track. People ask her when is she going to slow down and Karon's response is "when you make the final turn you don't slow down, you speed up."

The "Heroes Among Us" story series will be released twice monthly, featuring local heroes and organizations that exemplify the Totally Texas, All American spirit that is the fabric of the Gainesville Community. Stories are contributed by the City of Gainesville, Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, Gainesville Economic Development Corporation, Gainesville Independent School District, and North Central Texas College. Keep an eye out for the stories and see who we celebrate next!

Release is coordinated by the City of Gainesville. Contact Caitlyn Huddleston, City Secretary, at (940) 668-4500 for more information.

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