

AFPMASH MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

LISA GENTILE, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR AT COPELAND OAKS FOUNDATION



Was fundraising your first career choice?

Most of us don't set out to become professional fundraisers; I think you just kind of "fall into it." My first career plan was to work in HR at a for-profit manufacturing company. Transitioning from a for-profit company to a not-for-profit organization was certainly a huge change for me. When I would spend the day meeting and talking with donors, I remember thinking, "Wow, I'm getting paid for this, is this really considered a job?" And I've been in development work for more than 17 years now and still loving it just as much as I did when I started.

What do you like best about your work?

As the Administrator of the Oaks Foundation and the Director of Development for Copeland Oaks Retirement Community, the best part of my job is meeting with donors and learning about them and their families. I find people interesting and absolutely enjoy the time I spend getting to know them better. I spend the most time with donors that I know are passionate about the organization I work for and understand our mission. When I'm having a bad day, I reach out to those who are making a positive impact in the community and it always makes me feel better.

What suggestions would you give to someone entering the field?

The best advice I can give to someone entering the fundraising field is to be a great listener. Really listen to what your donors and prospective donors are saying. If a donor has questions about a particular project you are raising funds for, get them the answers they are seeking. Always follow through and do what you say you are going to do and keep the communication going. Remember to step outside of your comfort zone; we can't grow unless we challenge ourselves to step into unfamiliar territory.

What trends have you noticed?

The majority of my donor base comes from the "World War II" generation. These folks were savers and enjoy spending time with others and believe in supporting charities and helping people. This is a fading trend as these folks are leaving us and being replaced by the "Baby Boomers." In fundraising we have to keep pace with trends and the ever-changing new donors coming on the horizon.

What do you like best about being part of AFP?

I truly believe that I would not be as successful as I am in my career had it not been for my local AFP group! This group has helped me grow professionally and walked me through some really difficult times in fundraising. After an AFP meeting I always feel re-energized and ready to take on the world. This group means more to me than words can describe. It's electrifying to sit in a room with your peers who understand the same fundraising hurdles that we all face at one time or another. AFP is absolutely the best resource group out there to help fundraisers succeed!

What leadership roles have you held in the AFP Chapter?

I'm currently a member of the AFP Mahoning/Shenango Valley Board of Directors and have had the pleasure of holding positions as VP of Programming and VP of Membership. If you are an AFP member I hope you are taking advantage of the educational programs offered and if you are not-yet-a-member, please consider joining this amazing group who will welcome you with great enthusiasm!