NNB News: 2013 : 12 : 05 : Midtown Woman Motivated to Lead By Her Desire To Help Others

Courtney Parish
ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Many people rely on caffeine as fuel to power them through daily responsibilities. LaVerne Feaster-Johnson, on the other hand, is fueled by a desire to make a difference in people's lives. She works as the Program Manager at Department of Veterans Affairs for Bay Pines Veterans Affairs Healthcare System.

As one of the first people to graduate with a Masters in Social Work from the University of South Florida, social work is in Feaster-Johnson's blood. Her mother was a Licensed Practical Nurse at the state psychiatric facility in Philadelphia, Pa.; she worked with individuals who had mental health problems.

"I remember picking my mother up from work one day and a patient tried to follow her home. She coaxed him back into the building by reassuring him that he wasn't different or dysfunctional, he just functioned differently," Feaster-Johnson said. Her mother's kind and accepting attitude is something Feaster-Johnson admires and wants to pass on to the people whose lives she touches.

Feaster-Johnson moved from Philadelphia to St. Petersburg, Fla. in 1974 after receiving her undergraduate degree in Social Work. Fresh out of college, her first job was as a paraprofessional for Wildwood Elementary School where she taught remedial reading and math. She enjoyed working with children but desired a job in her field.

In 1975, Horizon Hospital, a private hospital opened in the St. Petersburg area which later hired Feaster-Johnson as a Clinical Social Worker. As part of her responsibilities she recorded patient's medical and family history, performed psychological assessments and conducted individual and group counseling.

The University of South Florida launched their masters degree program for social work in 1981. Feaster-Johnson participated in a task force that conducted a survey on the bay area to see if there were enough people interested in social work to keep start a masters program in social work. After
Midtown Woman Motivated to Lead By Her Desire To Help Others | Neighbors

participating in the task force, they asked her if she had considered attending to graduate school. She was part of the first class to graduate from USF with a master’s degree in social work in 1983.

After graduating USF, Feaster-Johnson left Horizon Hospital to work for a residential treatment program for emotionally disturbed children. Children with emotional problems, aged 6-16 were housed in the facility. Feaster-Johnson conducted individual and group therapy and family therapy. She enjoyed working with the children and their families to communicate openly and find ways to improve the child’s environment.

“The needs of the children spoke to me. I enjoyed seeing the gratification of the individuals who I served. Especially when they learned that funding and services were available to help improve their quality of living,” Feaster-Johnson said. While she enjoyed working with the children and families, she desired job security.

Feaster-Johnson left the residential treatment program she was working for to work for Bay Pines VA hospital. In the 30 years she has worked for Bay Pines VA, she has built her career. Feaster-Johnson has worked as a Medical Social Worker, an Inpatient Psychiatry and a Family Therapist. She is currently serving as Program Manager at the Department of Veteran Affairs.

During this time, Feaster-Johnson was inspired to create a rehabilitation program that helped homeless veterans get back into a working environment. She went through the grant podium program and drafted a grant for the homeless program.

She was awarded funds and a team of people who focused on hiring homeless veterans for oddball jobs around Bay Pines VA Hospital. The Veterans were offered stipend in exchange for their labor. Some of the veterans who went through the program were offered a job at Bay Pines VA Hospital. Others used the opportunity as a chance to build up their resume and network to get jobs elsewhere.

Feaster Johnson is serving her last year at Bay Pines VA Hospital as Program Manager at the Department of Veteran Affairs.

"As a 30 year employee who is now planning her retirement, it is amazing to see how effective she can be to resolve problems," Patricia Frederick, Suicide Prevention Coordinator for Bay Pines VA Hospital said. "Just this morning she was able to assist a veteran with something very complicated and she knew exactly who to speak with and was persistent until she learned that the problem had been resolved. When she informed the veteran he was delighted."

Though Feaster-Johnson plans on retiring this January, she is not hanging up her hat and will continue her leadership role as President of Blacks in Government. An organization that helps young people in the Midtown community make connections to earn jobs working for the Federal Government.

"Laverne is a very unique leader she is very committed to the VA first and then to Blacks in Government as President of our chapter. She is very committed, very thorough, very organized and very hard to say no to. Her charm, caring, genuine personality and commitment to her beliefs make her hard to say no to," Jonathan Wade, Vice President of Blacks in Government said.

Feaster-Johnson plans on investing the money she has earned into opening her own practice. She wants to focus on individual and couples therapy, since this has been her strong point throughout her career. As a way of giving back to her struggling community, she wants to continue helping people in the Midtown community by opening her practice in St. Petersburg.

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website