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Healing and Helping in New York City ■ Cool Girls
2002 Tour of Kitchens ■ Rejuvenating Spa Getaways



by Anne Hampson Boatwright

That well-known, beaming smile greeted me one bright autumn afternoon as Monica Kaufman, news anchor for WSB Channel 2, ushered me to a quiet place in the television station. Even her walk had energy and life to it, and I would soon see the inner energy she has for issues that are important to her—one being membership in The Junior League of Atlanta, Inc.

A native of Louisville, Kentucky and an Atlanta resident since 1975, Monica Kaufman is known for her Emmy Award-winning reporting and is a household name in Atlanta. When I inquired how she became interested in the JLA, Monica shared how a co-worker's wife approached her to discuss membership nomination. Perceiving the JLA to be an exclusive group of women, she was concerned about how she would fit in as a black woman with a German name. She found welcoming arms and ample opportunities for combining her goals of

Monica Kaufman

Views from the newsdesk.

consolidating her volunteer efforts as well as building a network of friends, business contacts, and leadership training resources. She was amazed to find women she'd already met through church and Leadership Atlanta, as well as other fascinating women with whom she would form significant relationships. It became clear that the JLA was an organization of women who were "committed to working in places that most folk don't want to work," and she wanted to be a part of it.

On Volunteering and Sustaining

One of Monica's first placements, and one of her favorites, was at Grady Memorial Hospital working in recreation therapy. She also volunteered at the JLA's Nearly New Shop, sold ads for the Atlanta Opera, and taught a public speaking course to League members.

When it came time to sustain (Monica's humorous nickname for sustainers is "Exhausted Hens"), she was ready to transition from focus on community and in-League volunteering to financial support and social connections. "We

all have the same goal—learning, sharing information, improving things not only for the city of Atlanta but also for our children.” Monica likens retaining her JLA membership to her continued interest in her sorority. “I pay my dues even though I’m not active. It’s a woman-based organization that still needs money for programs and advocacy, and if my dues can help in that direction, let me do that. And every once in a while, I see a Sustainer program that would be fun to learn about.” The value of staying connected is worth its weight in dues, she concludes. And besides, “it’s not that much money—you spend that much on pantyhose in two months! And it’s a tax write-off.” Whether one is Active or Sustaining, she insists, the relationships you form are long lasting. “The leadership skills you develop are so good for your self esteem as well as helpful to connect you to the community where you can make a difference.”

Lessons Learned

As a woman in the prime of her life (“I’m timeless, I like to say”), Monica has learned some important life lessons. Her experience with breast cancer helped her realize she needed to slow down and simplify. “I’ve finally learned to say ‘no’. I stopped being a ‘pleaser’.” Before she had a personal assistant to manage her schedule, she’d determine how many things she could handle per week and set a reasonable limit. Also she gave more responsibility to her daughter when she was young. Of delegating, she affirms, “it didn’t make me feel less human or like I wasn’t good at what I was doing, it made me feel better.” Learning to focus on priorities has been a journey she admits has taken most of her life.

What does Monica envision for the future of the Junior League of Atlanta? She looks forward to more involvement with the Hispanic and Asian communities and hopes to see an increased public awareness of the JLA and recognition for its tremendous contributions. The growing business and nonprofit partnerships and increasing knowledge of JLA work, she asserts, will only help form more successful and productive partnerships in the future. Since many League members are single, working women and may remain so, attending to the needs of older women will become increasingly important, she adds, especially as members age.

Priorities

When America experienced the horrific terrorist attacks last September, Monica was called back from vacation to report the events.

Though she is often so close to such bad news, Monica chooses not to be absorbed by it. She explains, “If you’re a person of faith, then why do you fear? You just know that things sometimes happen and what you have to do is work through them”. Her focus is on that which is most important: family; relationships; work, both paid and volunteer; and caring for herself. Pondering what it would have been like had she joined the JLA at a younger age, she reflects, “I think about the directions in which I might have gone because I got to experiment with a lot of things in the JLA that helped me determine my future direction. I just hope my daughter will consider membership because it would be a wonderful opportunity for her. I’ve really enjoyed my time in the Junior League of Atlanta. As much as I gave, I got back.” ☸



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