

GIVING

There's something about Mary

sarahOWEN

President and CEO,
Southwest Florida Community Foundation



I'm guessing that if I mention the name Norman Love, the first thing that comes to mind is chocolate. Not just any chocolate, but rather world renowned, mind blowing edible works of art.

Southwest Florida is extremely fortunate that Norman Love has built his life and his business here. Not only does it mean that we have immediate and easy access to what many consider the finest chocolate creations in the world, but we benefit greatly from Norman Love Confections' commitment to making our region great. The company has grown significantly over the last several years and as the business grows so does the impact it makes on our communities.

When I hear the name Norman Love, my first thought is Mary. Mary Love, that is. Mary is Norman's wife and a quiet force behind the success of the company. My first introduction to Norman Love Confections was actually not via the gourmet chocolates, but rather through Mary's passion to help others.

As busy as she is managing the business operations of the company, she is equally engaged in community philanthropy. I was first introduced to her when she reached out to the hunger organization I worked for to find out how she could help make sure her neighbors in Southwest Florida were not going hungry, particularly children. She wanted to know how Norman Love Confections could be involved in solving the hunger issue.

I soon learned that she reached out to numerous organizations whose causes she was passionate about to find out how she could help. You may see the famous and easily identifiable green NLC boxes at charity events all season long, but that is just an outward representation of the company's behind the scenes commitment to philanthropy. If the boxes are there you can be sure that Mary's influence is as well.

She is such a great example of creating a culture of giving within a thriving business that I asked her to speak with some of the philanthropists who have made donations to the Southwest Florida Community Foundation's Women's Legacy Fund endowment. We had invited these donors to a chocolate-making class at NLC, but we wanted to expose them to more than just a culinary adventure. These "Prima Donors" are actively engaged in funding issues that impact



COURTESY PHOTO

Mary Love and Sarah Owen

women and children in our region and I knew they would benefit from hearing Mary's perspective on both her role in the business and charitable causes, and apply it to their work with the WLF.

Mary was reluctant. I smile when I heard her describe herself as "just the former dental hygienist" who helps out behind the scenes, when in reality she keeps all the trains running on time for a large team of creative geniuses. Apparently on some days at NLC they are prepping and shipping out tens of thousands of the edible creations, none of which would be possible without Mary's strong presence.

I explained that we all wanted to talk to her and learn from her and she graciously obliged, moving gracefully between our marble slab cooking stations and answering questions about the business, her children and her passion for helping others. We did have to really press her to talk about herself but by the end of the evening, two of their award-winning chefs had coached us through a molded candy making class and we all left with a pound of handmade chocolate gems and a greater appreciation of all things NLC, especially Mary. ■

— *Founded in 1976, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation supports the communities of Lee, Charlotte, Collier, Glades and Hendry counties and also acts as the regional convener and leader with firsthand knowledge of community needs. With assets of more than \$80 million, the Community Foundation has provided more than \$57 million in grants and scholarships to the communities it serves. Last year, the foundation granted more than \$4 million to more than 100 different organizations supporting education, animal welfare, arts, health care and human services, including more than \$400,000 in regional community impact grants and \$450,000 in scholarship grants. For more information, visit floridacommunity.com or call 274-5900.*

