



United We Stand

MICHELLE HANTMAN

A first-generation American, Michelle Hantman grew up in Fairhaven and was the first in her family to graduate from college. While at Emerson College, she had internships in Los Angeles at CNN and Extra and flirted with the idea of becoming a news anchor. You can easily picture her on-air: A former Miss Massachusetts, she's eloquent and a natural in front of the camera.

But life in Los Angeles pointed her in another direction: back home to focus on non-profit work.

She wanted to make a difference. And though international non-profits often grab headlines and sexy celebrity endorsements, Hantman was eager to approach more bread and butter issues right in her own backyard.

"You hear about all the problems of the world, but there's dire need right here," she says. "I've spent my whole career here and when I say here, I mean *here*," she says, gesturing around her in the United Way offices in downtown New Bedford. "I've worked in

depth and breadth of what an organization like this does. Making things better is why I want to be here."

When the United Way's former president was leaving, she figured she was too young (at 28 years old) to throw her hat in the ring. But she knew the organization, its community partners, its supporters. She thought it was a long shot; she was wrong. In 2006, she became the first female and youngest president of the Greater New Bedford United Way.

The leadership gene was passed on to Hantman from her parents. Maria Neves, her mother and a Portuguese immigrant, owned two stores: Delilah's Bridal Salon and The Crowning Touch. Her father Joe Neves, a Brazilian immigrant, is a scallop boat captain.

Her appreciation for her heritage is vital to her identity. "My Portuguese is far from perfect. But I can go to a Portuguese restaurant and order in Portuguese. I like that," she says.

Just like when Hantman was growing up, the extended family gathers for a meal each weekend. When

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marketing, development...I've pretty much sat at every desk in this office."

Except for a brief stint at Global Learning Public charter school, she's been at a United Way desk since 2000.

She gets to see examples of community need and community spirit every day. She says, "It's only when I got to the United Way that I could appreciate the

she was a kid, they went to her grandparents' home. Now she brings her husband Jason and seven-year-old Maxson, to whom the leadership gene has already been instilled, to her parents' house.

Her mother will cook six different main dishes: "beef, chicken, shrimp, lamb chops..." Those weekly dinners at her parents are a good metaphor for Hantman's career: a smorgasbord of good things and home.