



Q: Please describe your family and how long you've lived in Montclair.

A: I am a Mountie through and through, born at Mountainside and educated in the Montclair Public Schools. After college I lived in NYC for many years and returned to Montclair when my husband and I decided to have children. Our two oldest are now in college and we have one in middle school. I can't imagine a better place to raise a family—the whole world is here. We have a strong arts culture, great music, food experiences and parks. We have a population that brings an abundance of backgrounds to the table: expatriates from all over the world, people who work in a wide variety of industries, a broad spectrum of socio-economic experiences, and a breadth of faith traditions, racial backgrounds and ethnicities. When we expose our children to this rich tapestry, we are raising kids who have not just a robust academic experience but who are also steeped in the diversity of the global community they will inherit.

Q: You are the director of Toni's Kitchen, a food ministry here in Montclair. Why was it created? What services does it provide? What's the most fulfilling thing about your experience there?

A: Toni's Kitchen was started over 30 years ago as a lenten project by members of St. Luke's Church. Their intent was to engage the community in understanding and addressing the nutritional needs of those who are struggling to put food on their tables. On the most basic level, we provide over 52,000 healthy meals a year—some being served on-site, some through our Healthy Backpack Program and some through partner organizations that work with low-income families. We also provide on-site connections with medical, dental and wellness programs, as well as individual therapy sessions, preventive case management and exercise programs. I love seeing the passion and talents of our volunteers and their commitment to seeing that everyone in our community has reliable access to healthy food.

Q: You also serve as the vice president of the Montclair Board of Education. Why did you join the BOE? What do you hope to accomplish during your tenure on the board?

A: I was fortunate enough to get a world-class education in the Montclair schools. I didn't realize how very special that was until I went off to college at the University of Virginia and saw how well-prepared I was to be there. Montclair schools continue to be excellent and I'd like to challenge us to think more broadly and holistically. We need to look through multiple lenses to ensure that all students find our schools to be welcoming, a place where they are challenged to grow and think deeply in ways that will serve them and their communities once they leave us. I think schools across the country are being challenged to reflect on the fundamental nature of education: its purpose, its use of resources and, of course, how we know we are being successful in achieving our goals. Schools can drive change not only internally, but also challenge us to reflect on our values as a community.

And with the process of hiring a new superintendent now underway, it's is an opportune time to be actively engaged in this dialogue.

Q: What are some ways that kids and families can volunteer together and make a difference in the community?

A: Volunteering together as a family is a tremendously rewarding experience. We have families at Toni's Kitchen who have volunteered together for many years and it creates a strong bond. I love seeing the kids who come by Toni's Kitchen to volunteer over the holidays when they're home from college. It affirms the impact that volunteering has had in their lives. Volunteering can be prepping and serving a meal together, baking cookies together and donating them, or doing a food drive in the neighborhood. Other volunteer opportunities in the community include tutoring, mentoring, taking an afternoon to clean up a park or help plant bulbs.

Q: Who inspires you and why?

A: Okay, corny answer here, but my mom. I am one of eight children and I grew up in a home that valued academics, contributing to the community and approaching life with the humility that allows for ongoing personal growth and learning. My mother is an avid reader. She's curious about the world around her and she's always willing to put herself in an uncomfortable space in order to learn and grow. She's a strong woman with a quick mind and a generous spirituality. I can't imagine someone more inspirational.