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Advocacy, collaboration, inclusion are priorities for new Executive Alliance president

By: Johanna Alonso Daily Record business reporter | September 28, 2021

The Executive Alliance, a Baltimore-area organization dedicated to advancing women in the workplace, has elected its new president, Mary Jean Herron. Herron, who has previously served as president-elect, treasurer and Finance Committee chair for the organization, stepped into the position on July 1. Her tenure as president will be two years.



Mary Jean Herron (Submitted photo).

Herron is the CEO of Wilmax Advisory and the CEO and co-founder of BayLake Solutions, a startup based in the coastal region of Texas that is developing storm shutters which are both decorative and effective. Her previous roles include senior finance officer and operations leader of Keswick Multi-Care and chief financial officer for Healthcare for the Homeless.

She also serves on the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and is a member of the boards of directors of the CASH Campaign of Maryland and the Y of Central Maryland.

The following interview has been edited and condensed for length.

TDR: How long have you been involved with the Executive Alliance and what is your interest in the mission of the organization?

Herron: I've been involved for seven or eight years.

What I'm really committed to is seeing that women take their rightful place within corporations. One of the things that we want to do is really change the conversation about women in the workplace, that they shouldn't be an afterthought, that there are many incredibly bright, very competent women who bring a fabulous perspective.

TDR: As president, what are your top goals and priorities?

Herron: For us, some of it is increasing collaboration amongst our members. We have a lot of members in a lot of different industries, and (we want to figure) out ways to help people engage with one another. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has made it a significant challenge to really get people involved.

We've also started a couple of new committees. One is our advocacy committee. We have been very sporadic in our advocacy; we helped pass [the gender diversity bill](#) in Maryland a couple of years ago, but we've never had a group sort of focused on what positions we want to take on women's issues, et cetera.

We're developing a number of programs to help support our members — as well as, in many cases, opening them up to the general community — on leadership, on ethics, on promoting yourself, et cetera: all things that serve our members that may also attract a wider audience.

And then the other thing that we're really focused on this year, as are many organizations, is diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, because I think that belonging is a significant piece. So, I've stood up a task force on that. I feel like we are inclusive, but we're not overt about it. And so we're looking for ways to make sure that everyone — all women, senior leaders, business owners, et cetera — feel welcomed to the organization.

TDR: With regards to encouraging collaboration, I was just wondering if you could talk about how you're planning to facilitate that as an organization.

Herron: We're really just getting started, but (at Executive Alliance meet-ups) we've had a few members come and meet one another and figure out, 'Hey, you're a good person for me to refer to somebody, or here's how we could work together, or how we could advance ideas.'

In some cases, people found board members for their nonprofits, or they found other people that would be great people to partner with — or just friends.

After a certain point, it becomes more difficult for people, as adults, to make new friends. When people share many of the same burdens and concerns that you do, just having somebody to talk to, to me, is a really important piece, particularly with COVID, where people are so isolated and we're doing most of our life by Zoom.

TDR: The other thing I wanted to follow up on is what you'll be focusing on with the advocacy committee.

Herron: We have our new advocacy committee, who are in process right now of developing an advocacy agenda, as well as reaching out to key female legislators. We're specifically looking at issues that support women and figuring out how we can work with other groups to get those issues supported, like we did when we built a coalition around the gender diversity bill.

It's in the pretty early stages — the committee just got started in August — so, they've not progressed very far yet, because you're talking about a lot of volunteers.

But that's what we're doing with advocacy, both figuring out the issues and then figuring out how we can work effectively with both legislators and other groups who are interested in issues affecting women. As we all know, there are so many women who have lost jobs in this pandemic. I'm sure there will be plenty of issues for us to get involved in.

TDR: Do you have any philosophies that are going to particularly guide you as president of the Executive Alliance?

Herron: I look for people's strengths and then fill in around them. This is how I have led people; you figure out what their strengths are and then you support around them.


I mean, I'm not good at everything. Nobody is. So, as I look at Executive Alliance and our committee chairs, et cetera, and I'm looking for who brings what strengths and how we can both leverage them, as well as support any gap that they may have.

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