

WOMAN

Sophisticated

November 2012

The Northshore's Best

Enterprising Woman
Mary-Brent Brown
Kids Wanna Help

A Festive Fall
in Covington
Senior Living





Photo by Heidi Bowers Photography

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Young Visionary Begins New Chapter— Mary-Brent Brown

WRITTEN BY AMY BOUTON

WHEN SAINT SCHOLASTICA Academy senior and teenaged trailblazer, Mary-Brent Brown ruminates over how she spent her adolescence, it will likely be with a sense of satisfaction that only a successful and storied philanthropist/entrepreneur could possibly know. “I think that giving is the only real way to make a difference in the world. I want that light bulb to go off when kids are young so that they have their whole lives to make a difference,” she says. “Kids want to be involved. They have the ability—they just need to also have the opportunity.”

For Mary-Brent, lack of opportunity was never an obstacle to any vision she had. In fact, it was often a catalyst. At the age of 12, Mary-Brent and her younger sister Beverly felt that while kids were allowed to participate in community outreach and volunteerism, they had little say in what their roles were or which groups they were actually helping. “We could participate, but we were never in a position to make decisions, like how we would raise the money and where the money would go,” she recalls. So they decided to raise their own money for pediatric leukemia patients through a fashion show. “We sat with our parents and told them our plan. At first they really didn’t get it,” she says. “They said it would be too much work. But when they found out I had already called local event centers and inquired about pricing and seating capacity for group events, they realized that we were going to do the work.” With that settled the girls began planning. “Beverly and I talked about negative peer pressure and how it affects the way girls see themselves. We wanted to do something to send them a different message.” That message came in the form of a pre-fashion show workshop that would not only teach the girls to model, it would give them other information such as how to avoid negative peer pressure, the importance of modesty, why it’s important to give back to your community, and that real beauty comes from being yourself.

That very successful fashion show has evolved into a very successful business. “Once we saw that there was a need for what we were offering, we decided to take it to the next level,” Mary-Brent says. “Beverly and I were learning how to run our own business and we wanted to share that with other kids.” The Lemonade Brigade® was formed in 2008 to do just that. Through the Lemonade Brigade® workshop boys and girls learn how to start and run a successful business, how to responsibly choose the beneficiary of the funds raised, and then provides them with all of the equipment they need to open a lemonade stand. “The workshops are the most important part of both the fashion show and the Lemonade Brigade®,” she says. “That’s where we empower kids with the knowledge and skills they need to become self-confident, lifelong philanthropists.”

Running a business is not easy for anyone, but doing it before college can provide its own challenges. Mary-Brent says that for the first few years there were parents who were initially skeptical about her ability to lead simply because of her age. “This has been a



Poised to hand over the reins to her little sister, Beverly, Mary-Brent is proud that Kids Wanna Help® has raised over \$100,000 to date.

challenge I have enjoyed—giving adults a new perspective on what kids can accomplish.” Even with the challenges, Mary-Brent says, “Being inspired to accomplish something you believe in will really carry you through. I want to make sure that kids have a voice, that they are able to accomplish something important without being told how to do it, and I want them ultimately to realize that they are powerful and can do whatever they set their minds to.”

Since the first pre-teen young lady graced the runway in 2007, Mary-Brent and Beverly’s Kids Wanna Help® organization has raised over \$115,000 for numerous charities. Mary-Brent attributes the success of Kids Wanna Help® to hard work, a commitment to success, and the importance of keeping plans fluid. “My parents have always taught me the importance of a ‘Plan B’ and this has helped me in many circumstances.” She also stresses the need for long and short range business plans and the value of paying attention to details. But ultimately, Mary-Brent says, “A successful business must fill a need.” That is exactly what Mary-Brent and Beverly have done.

In early November of this year, Mary-Brent will be recognized as a Blue Cross Blue Shield Angel for making life better for Louisiana children. In addition, Kids Wanna Help® will be recognized as the 2012 Nonprofit of the Year by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Greater Northshore Chapter. Only last month, Mary-Brent landed in the top four of *Glamour* magazine’s Women of the Year: Readers’ Choice Award. “I cannot believe that so many people took time out of their day to vote. Thank you to everyone who did!”

Mary-Brent was recently chosen as one of fifty ANNPpower Vital Voices fellows nationwide, selected by the Vital Voices Foundation to attend an all-expenses paid women’s leadership forum in Washington D.C.



ABOVE: Girls participate in a Kids Wanna Help® workshop, which focuses on self-worth and philanthropy.

Fellows were chosen based on their potential to be the next generation of leaders who will “transform and accelerate peace and prosperity.” She attended the Vital Voices awards ceremony which recognized women leaders from around the globe. “It was great to see that there are people all around the world who are involved with advancing women’s rights and to see 49 other women in our own country who are extremely dedicated to making positive changes in their communities.” She was mentored by Argentinean Congresswoman and civil rights activist, Laura Alonso, and participated in small group discussions with female world leaders, among them, Mu Sochua, a Cambodian Parliamentarian and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. “We all had the same spirit,” she says. “And we shared the same goals. It was a very positive experience.”

A sought-after keynote speaker herself, Mary-Brent hopes to emulate one of her role models, Dr. Elizabeth Fontham, recent past president of the American Cancer Society, and 2008 Kids Wanna Help® fashion show keynote speaker, in the next chapter of her life. Mary-Brent plans to attend a college “that promotes social responsibility” and find a business or medical school that will, as she says, “make me happy and prepare me for a successful career.” “Dr. Fontham has done so many things well in so many aspects of her life,” she says. “I want to have that same kind of balance.”

As Mary-Brent prepares for college, she and Beverly are working together to ensure a smooth transition in leadership. Her advice to other kids is, “Never think that you are too young to make a huge impact on our world and always set your goals very, very high.” ❀

To learn more about Kids Wanna Help® and the Lemonade Brigade®, visit www.kidswannahelp.com, or contact Mary-Brent by phone at 985-875-0407, or email her or Beverly at: browns@kidswannahelp.com.