

People & Places

UNSUNG HEROES

Boca woman is active with VIPS

By Darcy Clinton

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Name: Nicole Flier, 37

Residence: Boca Raton

Birthplace: Los Angeles

Family: Parents Dennis Flier and Carol Flier of Aventura

Career: Director of business development for James A. Cummings Inc.

Cause: South Florida VIPS, a Boca Raton-based social and networking organization designed to provide a fun and energetic venue for young professionals to meet. Membership is free and money raised during the group's events is donated to various local charities.

Q. Describe your volunteer role.

A. I co-founded SFVIPS with my best friend, Lori Ludwig. I've also volunteered for the American Heart Association for the past three years. For SFVIPS, Lori and I plan the events and come up with concepts or themes surrounding our ideas. I was also the American Heart Association's 2008 South County Go Red for Women chairwoman and will continue as the association's 2008-2009 South County chairwoman.

Q. Why do you volunteer?

A. Growing up, my parents were very involved with the community. They instilled a belief in me that it's important to do whatever you can to give back to the community.

Q. How did you come up with the idea for



Nicole Flier

South Florida VIPS?

A. It was really just a crazy idea Lori and I came up with because we were bored with the local social scene. We decided to host monthly happy hours to raise money for charitable organizations. We are raising money for groups that are making a difference in the community while at the same time surrounding ourselves with people with similar values.

Q. What have you accomplished?

A. I'm very proud of how our simple brainstorming session turned into a well-respected organization that has donated more than \$20,000 to local charities and has a membership database of more than 800 people. We started with about 40 guests at our first happy hour event, and our last few events have been attended by more than 200 people.

Q. What have you gained?

A. Just knowing that I've touched the lives of people who are less fortunate is a reward in itself.

It's hard to explain what a wonderful feeling it is to know that you are making a difference. Whether it's a formal award or just a casual conversation where someone says we helped, it makes me want to do more and work even harder.

Q. What advice would you give to someone who wants to volunteer?

A. I think the most important thing is to become involved with an organization that has some kind of personal meaning. If you start with something you're passionate about and really believe in, the rest will just fall into place naturally.

Q. Aside from money, what does your organization need?

A. We have our second annual Boca Bowling Bash coming up on Saturday. It would be great if we could get as many people as possible to come out and support our efforts during the event, which benefits Boca Helping Hands.

For more information about the South Florida VIPS or their 2nd Annual Boca Bowling Bash, visit www.sfvips.com.

If you know a Palm Beach County resident who deserves recognition for volunteer work, fax the information to 954-429-1207 or e-mail to darcyllynclinton@yahoo.com. Nominations should include volunteer's name, city of residence, a contact name and phone number, and a brief description of why this person deserves special recognition.