

 one-on-one

Cathy Cessna, ACFRE

When did you join AFP? I was a member of NSFE for years and received my CFRE in 2003. My first AFP board position was on the marketing committee for the AFP Greater Philadelphia Chapter (AFP-GPC).

How did you get involved in the nonprofit sector and fundraising? I have been volunteering since early childhood at church and was a missionary in Honduras and Guatemala in college. I began raising funds in high school



as the senior class president and negotiated a deal with McDonald's for our class to sell \$1 coupons, splitting the proceeds with the company. My committee raised \$6,000 (more than \$25,000 in today's dollars) so quickly that the McDonald's manager had to end the program! Later, as a stay-at-home mom, I served on three nonprofit boards and

worked almost 80 hours per week as a volunteer. I decided to change my career. I became certified at AFP-GPC's Villanova certification program, obtained my master's in public administration and then applied for my first job at my children's school as assistant director of development.

What do you consider the greatest challenge in your work? Data entry. Loathe it!

If money were no object, what resources would make your job easier and more effective? LexisNexis® for prospect research! I can only dream of what it would be like to have access to highly sophisticated research tools!

Why did you feel it was important to earn the ACFRE credential? The ACFRE process was surprisingly easy. I write for a living, and each piece of documentation required asked me to express my opinion on a subject matter that was relevant to my career. Like most people, I love to share my opinions! It took four months from start to finish, with the exception of the time it took for the exam to be graded.

I want to be the best at everything I do and set an example for my children and grandchildren. My son lost his brother during his junior year of college. Instead of taking time off, he graduated on time and earned a double degree, saying, "One is for me; the other is for Andrew, who will never have the chance." Max's

Lifetime Highlights:

- Assisted Living Conversion Program (ALCP), \$1,021,450 award, Department of Housing and Urban Development, June 2004
- Green Retrofit Program, \$1,814,558 award, federal government, January 2009
- HUD SUPERNOFA—HUD 202 Grant, \$5,679,700 award, Department of Housing and Urban Development, September 2010
- National MetLife Award for Excellence in Affordable Housing, \$50,000, June 2011
- Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science, Shell Show 1st Place, October 2014. Won first prize in the double, contemporary Sailor's Valentine artistic division for "Women of the Odyssey" and second place for the single, contemporary valentine, "Saltfish."

comment inspired me to get my ACFRE. I needed to create something positive from grief and loss. Now, I am looking for that next goal to achieve.

What do you think are the greatest misconceptions—still—about fundraising? Many individuals outside of the profession believe that fundraising is not a specific skill or science and that anyone can be an excellent fundraiser. Educating the public and changing their perception about our profession is one of the best services we can do for ourselves and for other AFP members.

What is the best career advice you ever received? "Never retire." I never plan to!

If you could do anything differently with regard to your work so far, what would it be? Have an assistant to do data entry!

What is your motto? "No means no."

What do you hope to do that you haven't done yet? Hold my first grandchild.

How would you describe your perfect day? Snorkeling in Roatan, Honduras, with my family. 🍷

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