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By John Schaffner

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Sharon Silva

After posting a news update on our website announcing that Sharon Silva would be leaving the Buckhead Business Association as its executive director, I received a weekend phone call from a former BBA board member telling me I needed to write a better piece about Silva.

Silva announced May 6 that she is resigning at the end of May in order to spend more time with her 89-year-old father, who lives here in Atlanta.

“Sharon Silva is the glue that has held the BBA together,” said Kelly Brantley, who most recently was the point person in starting a business and community organization in Brookhaven called the Brookhaven Community Connection.

Brantley was a member of the BBA board when Silva came on board in 2005. Brantley and Donna Kain, a vice president with State Bank & Trust and BBA president in 2006, were the ones who came up with the idea of adding restaurants to the association’s annual business expo and making it into the Taste of Buckhead Business Expo starting in 2005.

That annual event was just held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Buckhead on May 20 and had free food from 18 of Buckhead’s top restaurants and booths for almost 50 businesses.

Brantley called Silva a “super duper” leader for the group and a person with a “personal style that was perfectly suited for the job.” Brantley said it was not only Silva’s devotion to the job as executive director of BBA, but her “passion for Buckhead” that made her so effective.

“There is never a good time to make a change and certainly this was a tough decision to make,” Silva told the BBA members and guests during the organization’s weekly breakfast meeting May 6 at the City Club of Buckhead. “It is the perfect job.”

Silva said one of the things she enjoys most about the BBA “is we are different from so many other organizations. Our members get to know each other and genuinely like each other.” “Sharon has been a huge asset to the BBA,” said immediate past president Elizabeth Gill. “Because of her hard work over the past five years, we have grown and prospered, despite challenging economic times.”

“Sharon has been an invaluable asset for the BBA, helping to grow our membership and to increase board participation during her tenure,” stated present president Heather Wright. She said Silva will be missed as executive director but is happy she will continue to be active in the association as a member.

It was actually former BBA President Michael Moore, who bills himself as chief rainmaker, who originally got Silva to the BBA. She met him when she was working at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce in membership sales there.

“I thought it (the BBA) was wonderful and dubbed it ‘chamber lite’ because it was similar to the Metro Atlanta Chamber, but smaller and warmer as a group,” Silva said. “I was a member for a good year and then spoke with Doug Eidson and Donna Kain about coming on board (as an employee).”

Prior to the metro Chamber, Silva had spent 20 years working in equipment finance of various sorts, with such companies as Citicorp Industrial Credit, BellSouth Financial Services and CIT.

“I had always known equipment financing was not my thing, but sometimes you just stay, do different things, go to different companies that have different twists on things,” Silva said. “I just woke up one day and said I have been here for 20 years and I never meant to be here at all.”

Sharon was born and raised in New York City. She came to Atlanta originally to study at Emory. She got her degree in romance languages and met her husband who was in medical school. Living in Atlanta worked out for her, the marriage didn't.

Her father mother eventually moved to Atlanta in 1987 to live closer to their daughter. Her mother died three years ago. Silva lived in Dunwoody for 25 years before moving to Buckhead years ago and into Park Place, where her father also has a condo.

Her father turned 89 this year and she decided she wants to spend more time with him, which was not possible with the demands of the job at the BBA.

But Silva has a great fondness for the BBA and its members. “What the BBA meant to me was the ability to spend more time with the members. I said this is where I would like to be and it fell on the right ears at the right time.”

Eidson and Kain really embraced it in terms of how this could work for the BBA. “They asked me if I would like to be executive director. It was sort of like being proposed to. To me, that was the perfect fit because I really wanted to work for the BBA.”

Since 2005, she has worked with six presidents: Eidson in 2005; Kain in 2006; Geoff Friedman in 2007; Peter Rooney in 2008; Gill in 2009; and Wright in 2010.

Silva pointed to some major BBA accomplishments while she has been executive director. The 51-year-old association had about 300 members when she started and has over 400 members now.

“Certainly the growth of Taste of Buckhead Business,” she said. “The first year when I was a member, they had it down one of the wings at Phipps Plaza between the stores. It was nice, but nothing like it has become. When I came aboard we had very few corporate sponsors—maybe 10. In the heyday, before the economy took its turn, we had over 30 sponsors.

“One of the things I was hired to do was develop a consistent face for the BBA,” Silva said. “One of the main parts of my job was to be visible out there and bring continuity to the organization. I think I am proudest of that. I think when people see me they think BBA.

“I genuinely like getting to know people and genuinely like being able to connect people. That makes me happy. That part of my personality is where the strength was,” Silva said.

“Talk about ‘moving it up a notch’ ...that doesn’t begin to describe Sharon Silva and what she accomplished during her five years with BBA,” said Kain.

“Even though this organization has over 50 years of history, it had always functioned as a volunteer organization with an a part time administration employee. That totally changed in 2005 when Sharon came on board as the first Executive Director.” Kain explained.

“She will fondly be remembered as the BBA’s ‘FACE’ in the community. Presidents come and go... the Executive Director lives on. She is a legend!” stated Kain.



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