

New president wants Phil to inspire

September 20, 2006 | *Old Colony Memorial*

By **Andria Farrell, MPG Newspapers**



Phil President Paula Harris

DUXBURY – Paula Harris was introduced to the Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra when she and her husband, William, were renting space for their investment business on Cape Cod. George Scharr, a 25-year veteran performer for the Phil, had an office next door to her company with some brochures for the upcoming season on display. When Harris questioned him about the organization, Scharr encouraged her to become a season ticket holder and learn about the Phil.

After five years as a season-ticket holder, and one on the Phil's board of directors, Harris has taken on the challenge of board president. As an active member of the Duxbury community, owner of a small investment company and a longtime fan of the orchestra, she felt it was the right time to lend her business skills to the organization she loves dearly.

"It is an exciting job, a lot of work; sometimes the amount of work can overwhelm people, but I felt it was such an important organization that I had skills and talents I could lend to the Phil," she said. "I felt it was the right time to put my name in the hat for the job."

Harris replaces Duxbury resident John Stanton, who served as Phil president for two years.

"The role (of president) is to help set the vision of where the orchestra is going, to recruit new board members and inspire existing board members – to be a public face for the orchestra and the community," she said. Harris is co-owner of WH Cornerstone Investments in Duxbury, an investment company that focuses on financial planning for women. She chairs the Duxbury Open Space and Recreation Committee, sits on the board of the ACCESSAIL program at the Duxbury Bay Maritime Academy and serves on the community advisory board of the Alden House Historic Site.

She also serves as director of the Boston-based Downtown Women's Club's South Shore chapter and sits on the governing body of the Athena PowerLink program with the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. She is also an accomplished cheese maker.

In her new role, Harris said it is her job to make connections and open doors so the orchestra continues to grow. This year, Harris has started Symphony Soirees, an initiative created to introduce people to the orchestra and provide a venue for young professionals to socialize and meet new people in. The first soiree also marks the beginning of the new orchestra season, which opens Saturday, Sept. 30.

Harris admits she may not know how to play an instrument, and she may not know every piece the orchestra plays, but she knows she will always have a wonderful time when she is there. Despite having no musical background, she has learned so much about how music and the arts can open minds and inspire. Her work has enabled her to help her clients in a new way and see things through an artistic lens.

"I don't know all the pieces, but I know that I will be entertained at every concert, and there are few on the calendar. I know Steve (Karidoyanes, Phil conductor) will entertain me and provide me with a wonderful performance that evening," she said.

So much of what the Phil does involves the community, especially children, Harris said. Introducing music to children at a young age enables the organization to keep the music playing for generations. She said that last season's performances with South Shore high school students were inspiring for both the children and the professional musicians. Harris wants to ensure the Phil is accessible to all age groups.

"Playing with a professional group creates the opportunity for students to have a life-altering experience," Harris said. "For some students, it may spark them to go on and pursue a musical career and for some students, it may be a highlight of their musical career; either way, it is a great opportunity to provide for the community.

"I am 39 – younger than most concert-goers. If my generation does not get involved, how will it be passed down? I felt it was really important that I get involved."

So much goes on behind the scenes of the orchestra and Harris is there every step of the way to make sure each event goes off without a hitch. As a season-ticket holder, she often takes friends to experience their first Phil concert. By the end of every performance, they are wowed; they can't believe they are in Plymouth experiencing a world-class concert.

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