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Laura Wheat

by Diane S. W. Lee

March 23, 2012

Content

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Photo by Diane S.W. Lee

Westlake mayor juggles town needs, nonprofit work

Editor's Note: The Town of Westlake is now included in our distribution area. We thought this would be a good time to profile the Westlake mayor.

Fresh out of the University of Maryland School of Law in 1982, Laura Wheat booked a ticket to Dallas to practice corporate securities law. And she could not wait to get there.

"I'll never forget landing here and the pilot announcing that we were approaching DFW, and I just felt like I was coming home," she said.

Wheat grew up in Moon Township, Penn., but has made Texas her home. At age 32, Wheat quit practicing law after discovering she had breast cancer in 1993. She got involved with nonprofits, serving as co-chairwoman of the national and local Cancer Support Community, and a board member of Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine. She moved to Westlake in 2005 and ran for mayor in spring 2008 after fundraising for the Arts and Sciences building at Westlake Academy.

"I couldn't believe that places like this still existed," she said. "The people were all so genuinely friendly. I felt as if there was a real like-mindedness to the community."

Why did you decide to run for mayor?

I got very involved with raising funds for what was to be our new Arts and Sciences building at Westlake Academy. In the course of raising those dollars, I came to understand that there was just a lot of



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controversy which was under the surface as it related to the school. I think there were a lot of people who were new to the community who didn't feel like their voices were being heard. I think I was viewed as a person who could listen to other peoples' opinions and allow them a forum. And so I was approached about running for mayor, and Doug, my husband, and I gave it a tremendous amount of thought and decided that it was the best thing to do.

What do you consider your most important role as mayor?

I consider my most important role as mayor to be the face of the Town of Westlake. I do interface with a lot of businesses that are here, business development prospects. That's my role and I do consider that to be very important.

What is the greatest challenge facing Westlake?

Development: How we will be developed, when we will be developed, what that development will look like. We have the opportunity to work with our large land owners in terms of the zoning laws and how things will look. We don't necessarily have a lot of input in terms of what will go into these vast acres that are still left undeveloped, but I think that is a big challenge. And you throw on top of that the regional challenges we all face in terms of transportation, water and air quality.

What are your goals for 2012?

We are looking at revising our master plan and that's a big job. As far as another goal, it would relate to Westlake Academy, a master plan: How big Westlake Academy should be, what are those optimal sizes, what, if any, building requirements will come out of that. Those are all things that we are struggling with now and having those decisions made by the end of the year are both goals of mine.

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