New United Way Houston CEO sought mission-oriented role after time at Anadarko, law firm

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Amanda McMillian is less than a week into her role as president and CEO of the United Way of Greater Houston, one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the region. After spending almost 15 years with Anadarko Petroleum Corp., most recently as executive vice president and general counsel, McMillian started her new United Way job May 1.

Although McMillian has a lot of nonprofit experience — she previously served as president of the board of directors for the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center and on the advisory board of the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra — it’s her first time working full-time for a nonprofit, she told the Houston Business Journal. But McMillian knows that she has stepped into an important position at a time of great need.

“There’s certainly no doubt that there’s just incredible stress in the greater Houston community right now from an economic perspective,” McMillian said. “The basic needs of people right now are so great, and I think they do dwarf what we saw in [Hurricane] Harvey.”

Prior to her time working in legal roles within Anadarko, McMillian practiced corporate and securities law with Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. But after leaving Anadarko in August 2019 when it was acquired by Occidental Petroleum Corp. (NYSE: OXY), McMillian said that she wanted to work in a more mission-oriented role to serve the community.

"One of the things that drew me to the United Way, in particular, was the potential for exponential impact," McMillian said. "I think that's one of the driving forces behind why United Way has been here for almost 100 years."

One of the United Way of Greater Houston's most notable recent initiatives is the Greater Houston Covid-19 Recovery Fund. Launched by the United Way and the Greater Houston Community Foundation in late March with a $1 million donation from the Houston Endowment, the fund has since grown to over $13.3 million, McMillian said.

In April, the fund deployed over $1.5 million into 30 nonprofit partners to serve communities where residents need access to food and financial assistance. The next round of disbursements from the fund should be announced within days, according to a United Way spokesperson.

While Covid-19 relief is among the organization's most immediate concerns, McMillian was tapped to lead the United Way under its new strategic direction, dubbed "Second Century Vision." That direction, aligned with the organization's upcoming 100th anniversary in 2021, will focus on the financial wellbeing of those in poverty and those whom the organization has identified as “asset limited, income constrained, employed” or ALICE.

"Being able to execute on that for individuals and families across Houston — that’s what I’m squarely focused on," McMillian said.

Chris Mathews
Reporter
Houston Business Journal