

A portrait of Pat Hayes, a woman with short, wavy, light-colored hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a green textured cardigan over a white collared shirt with a small decorative brooch at the neck. The background is a simple indoor setting with a framed picture on the wall.

PROFILE

Pat Hayes

A Lifelong Leader, Committed to Community

Story by S. Kay Bell

Photo by Marc Swendner

Pat Hayes came to Austin 22 years ago, not knowing a soul. Now, newly retired from the Seton Healthcare Network, she's an integral member of the community she helped build.

COMMUNITY. THE DICTIONARY SAYS it's a group of people living in the same locality under the same government.

But those who know Patricia Hayes say that Merriam-Webster would be more accurate if it simply replaced all those words with her photo. They're also quick to add that since Pat (that's what most call her) Hayes arrived in the Texas capital, she's helped make this community much better.

Hayes, who on July 1st, stepped down from her post as executive vice president and chief operating officer for the Seton Healthcare Network, shakes off such praise.

She doesn't, however, dispute her commitment to community. And while modesty prevents her from detailing just how much she's done, you can see it in how she lives, always seeking new learning opportunities, embracing continual spiritual growth and participating in any way possible to improve wherever she calls home.

For the last 22 years, home has been Austin. The organizations and projects Hayes has championed read like a public service directory for the Central Texas region: Dell Children's Medical Center, KLRU, United Way Capital Area, Health Alliance for Austin Musicians, National Commission on Migrant Education, Central Texas Citizens Education Project, Mayor's Commission on Social Equity. The list goes on and on.

Oh, by the way, all this involvement was while Hayes tended to her responsibilities with Seton and its 22 medical service locations. Or, before that, as the first woman to lead St. Edward's University, where she helped guide the school through a period of unprecedented growth.

Sitting in her Seton Medical Center office just days before trading her healthcare network duties for consult-

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ing, Hayes reflected on her life, her years in Austin and her future plans. A woman of consideration in every sense of the word, she speaks deliberately. A casual listener might interpret her matter-of-fact demeanor as detachment. Don't. Once Hayes starts talking about her life and her life's work, there's no mistaking the passion she brings to every endeavor.

Hayes' sense of community was formed early, in her upstate New York hometown of Johnson City. "It was a pretty traditional little community, one where there was a lot of values alignment among the PTA and the Girl Scouts and the churches and the neighborhood,"

A just-graduated Hayes, before trading her Johnson City High School books for those at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, NY. "I grew up in a small town in upstate New York, Johnson City...a pretty traditional little community where there was a lot of values alignment among the PTA, the Girl Scouts, the churches and the neighborhood."

she said. "When you went around with your Halloween outfit, people wanted to guess who you were because they knew all the kids in the neighborhood."

A sense of neighborhood also was a factor in Hayes' choice of college. It was a decision that altered not only her higher-education plans, but ultimately her life.

She fully intended to follow through on her long-standing plan to major in math at nearby Cornell University. But once she stepped onto the Albany campus of the College of Saint Rose, there was no going back. "I was so taken by the fact that the place was very warm and welcoming," said Hayes. "I just fell in love with it when I saw it."

It also was a particularly exciting time in Catholic education. "I had absolutely spectacular teaching there," said Hayes. "There were, in upstate New York in that era, maybe a thousand Sisters of Saint Joseph [who founded Saint Rose] and 10 other orders of Sisters."



Being part of such a vibrant educational and spiritual community led Hayes to another critical decision. After two years at the college, she joined the religious order.

As a Sister of Saint Joseph, Hayes shifted her educational focus. She majored in English, while also teaching high school chemistry and earth science, before heading to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., to earn her doctorate in philosophy. From there, she planned to return to Saint Rose and teach "for the rest of my life."

The Second Vatican Council, however, prompted the college to fill its teaching positions with lay people. So Hayes moved into administration, first as director of financial aid and admissions and then in finance.

"Actually, I backed into it through the physical plant and auxiliary services and personnel and computing," recalled Hayes. "In some ways, the range of all that I got to do - math, English, chemistry, marketing, accounting - was a very empowering environment in which I got to try a lot of stuff."

"It made me both confident that I could tackle a lot of things and gave me a lot of communication practice."

When you're in admissions you spend a lot of time talking to 17-year-olds about what they think, which is a very short conversation sometimes."

Eventually, though, Hayes had some deeper conversations with herself. After 16 years in the Sisters of Saint Joseph, she decided it was time to leave the order and subsequently the college, too.

"Much to my surprise, I was invited to take the presidency at St. Edward's," said Hayes. In 1984, as the first female and second layperson to lead the university, she arrived on campus "not knowing a person in Texas." That quickly changed.

"I had really been a back-of-the-house person," she said. "I hadn't been out in the community, but that's what St. Ed's needed. And the Austin community was really eager to partner, so I got involved in all these things that changed the way I understood the world I was working in."

Her world expanded further in 1998, when Hayes decided her work at St. Edward's was done. Although unsure about her next step, Hayes did know she wanted to stay in Austin.

"I could have gone on to another

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presidency, but it would have meant leaving Austin, starting all over again on this building of relationships. I learned at St. Ed's the whole power of collaboration, of getting out in the community and forming relationships before there's a problem."

Jim Walker, executive director of the Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project, is well acquainted with Hayes' relationship and consensus building skills. "Pat has the ability to listen to the concerns around the room and find, however slim it might be, that common ground that would be the best approach, the most favorable approach, for everybody," noted Walker.

That talent has served Hayes well at Seton, where network CEO Charles Barnett recruited her in 1998. "He said if I'd just come over here and supervise five departments, that would be great," recalled Hayes. "That job lasted three days. Pretty much since then, I've been in the number two role."

For Hayes, it's been a spectacular eight years in a "volatile and so truly life-and-death" field.

From the patients' standpoint, she's helped improve healthcare access for

the uninsured. She says the system is now more robust, but far from finished. She's confident, though, that she's leaving the effort "in the hands of very capable people."

Her other passion, worklife quality, affects her caregiver colleagues.

"It ought to be joyful to come to work," said Hayes. "People are able to give and be their best if they work in an affirming environment, where they're encouraged to really find some personal spiritual space to balance their lives."

"Healthcare workers are very generous people and sometimes you have to just practically hold onto them to keep them from burning out. This is a healing ministry, rooted in the infinite value of the human person. One of the things you have to keep saying to care providers is you're one of the people of infinite value."

"When we're trying to help people be healthy, it's important for us to be healthy. It's impossible if we just go-go-go and never take any space for ourselves."

Hayes hopes to put a bit more of that balance into her own life now that she's moving to an executive coaching and organizational development consulting role.

Groundbreaking of Seton Topfer in Summer of 1999. (L to R: Sr. Theresa Sullivan - Seton; Kathie Holliman - President, North Austin Civic Association; Diana Resnik - Seton; Angela Topfer; Pat Hayes and Larry Mejia - Seton)



"I'll be trying to spend some time with friends where I'm not checking things off the to-do list and traveling to places that are soul relaxing," she explained. Part of that travel likely will be to visit family. Her older brother Bob and his family are in Nashville. Her mother is in Florida, 88-plus and still going strong.

"She went to Australia three years ago and came back saying some of the people on the trip didn't like the hot air balloon or the snorkeling," recalled Hayes. "She thought those were two of the best things."

More recently, Mom called with an update on more routine pursuits.

"She had a great day bowling. Her

score for three games was 506," said Hayes, shaking her head, a small but proud smile crossing her face. "At 88. That's pretty amazing."

Her mother's energetic example has Hayes eager to see what the next phase of her own life adventure will bring.

"An awful lot of my life was devoted to getting ready for a professional and service career, and then moving through it and a parallel career in my personal life," she commented. "It's intriguing to think about what these next 30 years will mean. I can't wait to find out."

One thing's for sure, though. Whatever Hayes' life brings, it will include something that's also good for Austin and Central Texas communities. ★

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