

Protecting And Improving Palm Beach

An Interview with Mary Robosson, President and Chief Operating Officer, Palm Beach Civic Association

EDITORS' NOTE In 2019, Mary Robosson became the first woman to lead the Palm Beach Civic Association as President and Chief Operating Officer. She serves as one of four officers, including Michael Pucillo, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer; Michele Kessler, Vice Chair; and Michael Ainslie, Treasurer. Robosson joined the nonprofit organization in 2017 as Vice President, overseeing the organization's fundraising and membership growth.



Mary Robosson

With a mission of engaging residents, town leaders and stakeholders to protect and improve Palm Beach, she manages the day-to-day operations of the organization and the strategic planning for its future success. She collaborates with 17 Executive Committee members, 140 directors, 2,000 residential and corporate members, 15 volunteer committees and a staff of eight professionals. In 2018, she helped establish The Stanley M. Rumbough, Jr. Legacy Society, an endowment fund which serves as a catalyst to educate Palm Beach's citizens, through organized forums and symposiums, in perpetuity. Robosson has enhanced and expanded the civic association's communications initiatives, both written and video, which reaches close to 5,000 email subscribers. She has lived and worked in the greater Palm Beach community for more than 30 years. Robosson formerly served as Vice President for the Suzanne Wright Foundation and director of philanthropy for Autism Speaks and Vice President of Philanthropy for Palm Healthcare Foundation. She was the principal of Philanthropy|Strategic Marketing, a consulting firm that specialized in fundraising, which included restoration works of the Vatican Museums. Her previous positions include Senior Director of Development for Palm Beach Opera from 2004 to 2007, and for the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts from its grand opening in 1992 through 2004. Robosson also served as the Marketing Manager for the PGA of America's Seniors' Championship. Originally from Pittsburgh, Robosson is an accomplished golfer and played collegiate golf at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The mission of the Palm Beach Civic Association (palmbeachcivic.org) is to protect and improve the quality of life in the town of Palm Beach by taking proactive stands on civic affairs; informing, educating, and engaging residents on key town issues; working with local government; and encouraging citizen involvement in the community.

Will you highlight the history of Palm Beach Civic Association and how you define its mission?

The Palm Beach Civic Association was founded in 1944 by a handful of civic-minded residents who wished to preserve, protect, and enhance the special qualities of their amazing island. Under the leadership of Alexander H. Rutherford, first Civic Association President; Joseph F. Gunster, Vice President and the namesake of the first law firm in

Palm Beach; Page Hufty, Vice President; and famous Palm Beach architect John Volk, Civic Association secretary, the association quickly grew its membership to more than 300 members in the first two years. Today, the membership has grown to more than 2,200 men and women in a town of more than 9,000 year-round residents.

As the Civic Association commemorates 80 years, the mission remains the same: to protect and improve the quality of life in the Town of Palm Beach by taking proactive stands on civic affairs; informing, educating, and engaging

“For 80 years, this organization has worked cooperatively and constructively with the town government to enhance the quality of life in Palm Beach.”

Michael Pucillo, Palm Beach Civic Association Chairman and CEO



Palm Beach Civic Association President & COO Mary Robosson, Philanthropist and Environmentalist David Rockefeller Jr., and Palm Beach Civic Association Chairman & CEO Michael Pucillo at the 2024 Signature Series on February 27, 2024

“This year has marked a landmark celebration, as we honored the past while embracing a dynamic future through our ongoing educational engagement with the community and the work of our 15 standing committees. I believe our founders would be extremely proud of the extraordinary commitment of our directors and members.”

**Mary Robosson, Palm Beach Civic Association President & COO,
on the 80th anniversary**

residents on key town issues; working with local government; and encouraging citizen involvement in the community.

What have been the keys to the strength and impact of Palm Beach Civic Association?

The Civic Association’s willingness and ability to listen to the residents of the community and understand the issues that are important to them. Our committees, made up of volunteers in 15 key areas, are a vital part of this process. New challenges face the Town of Palm Beach as the population evolves and new families move onto the island.

The Civic Association uses its many educational initiatives to stay on top of the important town issues and share the information through Palm Beach TV, our weekly newscast; Studio 33480, featuring one-on-one interviews with the town’s newsmakers; *Our Town by William Kelly* print articles; and our digital newsletter, *The Civic*. These are distributed to close to 5,000 recipients via our Constant Contact email list.

We are grateful for the overwhelming generosity of the family of the late Stanley M. Rumbough, Jr. for establishing the Stanley M. Rumbough, Jr. Legacy Society and its growing endowment, which serves as a catalyst to educate our citizens through organized forums and symposiums into the future.

Will you provide an overview of Palm Beach Civic Association’s programs and forums?

Each season, the Civic Association delivers an informative and captivating array of speakers and forums focused on issues that relate to life on the island. In November, we kicked off the season with a “Welcome Back Community Forum” featuring the town’s zoning consultant, Sean Suder, who examined ways in which zoning code reform will shape Palm Beach’s future.

Our Signature Series presentations are an important part of the educational component of our nonprofit organization. This season, we

featured U.S. Senator Jack Reed, investment manager Paul Tudor Jones II, and conservationist David Rockefeller, Jr. as keynote speakers.

The Civic Association’s Community Service Award Breakfast is our only annual fundraiser, and the recipient of this year’s William J. “Bill” Brooks service award was our Chairman Emeritus, Bob Wright. Bob served as the Civic Association’s Chairman and CEO from 2010 through April 2023. He was the president and CEO of NBC and chairman and CEO of NBC Universal until 2007. NBC News’ Chief Political Analyst Chuck Todd was the keynote speaker at this season’s award breakfast.

The season culminates in our Annual Meeting, including the mayor’s State of the Town Address on April 8, which is the 80th

anniversary of the start of the Civic Association and a wonderful milestone to celebrate.

How important is it for Palm Beach Civic Association to have a strong working relationship with local government?

It’s extremely important for the Civic Association to have a strong working relationship with local government as part of our mission to educate and engage residents on key town issues, to encourage citizen involvement in the community, and to take proactive stands on civic affairs.

How valuable is it to have such an engaged and committed board of directors?

The vital work of the Civic Association is carried out by our directors who bring a rich tapestry of highly accomplished and diverse backgrounds to our organization. Many of our directors sit on our standing committees which



Palm Beach Civic Association Director Thomas Peterffy, Palm Beach Civic Association Director Hillie Mahoney, and Palm Beach Civic Association Chairman Emeritus Bob Wright at the Visionary Leader Luncheon at Cafe L’Europe on April 27, 2017

“We’re a remarkable organization. We have 140 directors who are leaders from all over the world. They want to be engaged. We have built a relationship with these leaders that enables us to study the issues the town is facing – including water quality, public safety, taxation, and finance – and offer advice. That’s why it’s fun to be a director. It’s exciting work.”

Michael Ainslie, Palm Beach Civic Association Treasurer



Palm Beach Civic Association Treasurer Michael Ainslie and Palm Beach Civic Association Director James Patterson, Keynote Speaker at the Palm Beach Civic Association Annual Community Award Breakfast at The Breakers on March 22, 2023

As Palm Beach Civic Association celebrates its 80th Anniversary, how important is it to take time to reflect on the important work of the Association over eight decades?

It’s incredibly important to take time out to reflect on what’s been accomplished and identify the key areas where the Civic Association can have the biggest impact going forward. We were very proud to see a turnout of more than 200 people in a standing room only capacity for our February 19 Candidates’ Forum. It was an opportunity for town voters to ask questions and hear from the two candidates vying for an opening on the Town Council, and a key part of our service as a civic organization.

What are your priorities for Palm Beach Civic Association as you look to the future?

We want to continue to foster the relationship with our members and see our membership grow over time. We aim to continue to strengthen our news initiatives and the vital work of our standing committees. We also seek to heighten our community engagement and education initiatives by building upon our Stanley M. Rumbough, Jr. Legacy Society endowment. ●

bring expertise to many issues of concern to the town’s residents, including healthcare, public safety, transportation, the environment, and water quality to name a few.

As of this writing, we have 140 Directors, three Chairmen Emeriti, three Honorary Directors and two Liaison Directors, each of whom helps make it possible for the Civic Association to fulfill our mission to protect and enhance the special quality of life in the Town of Palm Beach. In addition, our four officers, 17 executive committee members and our highly qualified staff of eight professionals helps guide us into the future.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead Palm Beach Civic Association and what do you enjoy most about the role?

I am so pleased and honored to be the first woman to represent the Civic Association as president and chief operating officer. I welcome the opportunity to carry the torch as we further our mission of bringing people together as conveners on the issues that we face. The Civic Association is highly effective because we have exceptional leaders who serve our organization, and the greater community, through their role as Civic Association directors or members. It’s a brilliant group of people, individually and collectively.



Palm Beach Civic Association Vice Chair Michele Kessler, Willie Geist, Anchor, NBC’s Sunday Today, and Howard Kessler at the Annual Award VIP Reception on February 27, 2022