



*Inspired by the White House term for the President's blue podium, the Bush Center's Blue Goose is the insider update designed for Administration Alumni.*

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## BUSH-CHENEY ALUMNI FIRST PERSON

**Reaching People and Building Lives**

by Page Austin



Five years ago, I accepted the position of lifestyle manager for Harvest, a Hillwood master-planned community in Argyle, Texas – a suburb of Fort Worth. When I saw the job description, I knew the job was written for me. The position of lifestyle manager falls under the Homeowners Association that is managed by FirstService Residential. Hillwood Communities, the developer of Harvest, wanted the community to be more than just homes. They wanted neighbors to gather and experience life together. Creating a culture like that is not easy. It takes the right person who has a passion for people and is willing to put in the work.

My role is relationship builder, vision caster, educator, storyteller, and event planner. I celebrate the victories and mourn alongside neighbors during the hard times. I held the hand of a recent widow and helped her find support in the neighborhood. I attend sporting events and cheer on our children. I worked with a neighbor to create a cancer support group. I am the residents' cheerleader, the public face, and the heartbeat of the community.

Working in the East Wing for First Lady Laura Bush was my dream job, the opportunity of a lifetime. I learned so much from her and her staff—especially from my first boss Director of Projects Anne Heiligenstein. They taught me that every person is valuable no matter their background. Mrs. Bush is one of the most caring and thoughtful people I have ever known. Watching her interact with the American people was inspiring. She made everyone feel accepted and valued. On my first day at the White House, Heiligenstein told me that I needed to treat others how Mrs. Bush would treat them. That stuck with me. You can be a great at your job, but it's how you treat others—in good and bad times—that really make the difference.

You learn a lot about yourself working in a place like the White House—the good and the bad. It's high pressure and high stress. Anita McBride, former chief of staff to Mrs. Bush, would always say that I looked like I was running around with my hair on fire. That was because I was so afraid to make a mistake and let Mrs. Bush down. I wanted to be perfect. I walked away from the White House with more clarity of who I am as a person. I am not perfect (I know, shocking), but I am someone who

loves people and wants others to be happy and succeed.

My current job allows me to use what I learned at the White House and to use my natural gifts of enthusiasm, energy, empathy, work ethic, and attention to detail to name a few. It's a rewarding position because I get to make a difference in people's lives.

I was honored to win the Dallas Builders Association's McSam award for Lifestyle Director of the Year and Best Lifestyle Program of the year for the second time. The McSam award has been around for 40 years, however, they just launched the awards for Lifestyle in 2017.

With more than 340 events planned in 2018, these are a few other accomplishments that stood out to the judges this year:

- Through their philanthropic activities, our teen council captured the attention of Nike, becoming Nike Community Ambassadors and hosting an event for more than 1,000 children.
- We received more than \$50,000 in sponsorships to supplement our lifestyle program budget to include more events and activities for residents. The budget is solely funded through HOA assessments and sponsorships.
- We more than doubled donations to our selected charity, the North Texas Food Bank. Of the 21,000-plus meals donated to the food bank in 2018, our teen council raised money to provide 6,450 meals.
- Launched a "Masters 50+" group that grew considerably from one monthly meeting to multiple get-togethers each month.
- Introduced monthly market days, including a Jingle Bell Market, where neighbors could sell their products, crafts, art, etc.

While I love planning events, it's really about the people--giving advice to a teenager, having coffee with a widow, or playing on the playground with the kids—that make me love coming to work every day. If you are ever in the Argyle area, please be sure to stop by and visit.

*Page Austin was a Presidential Schedule C Appointee at the U.S. Dept. of Energy before serving on Mrs. Bush's staff from September 2003 through August 2007.*