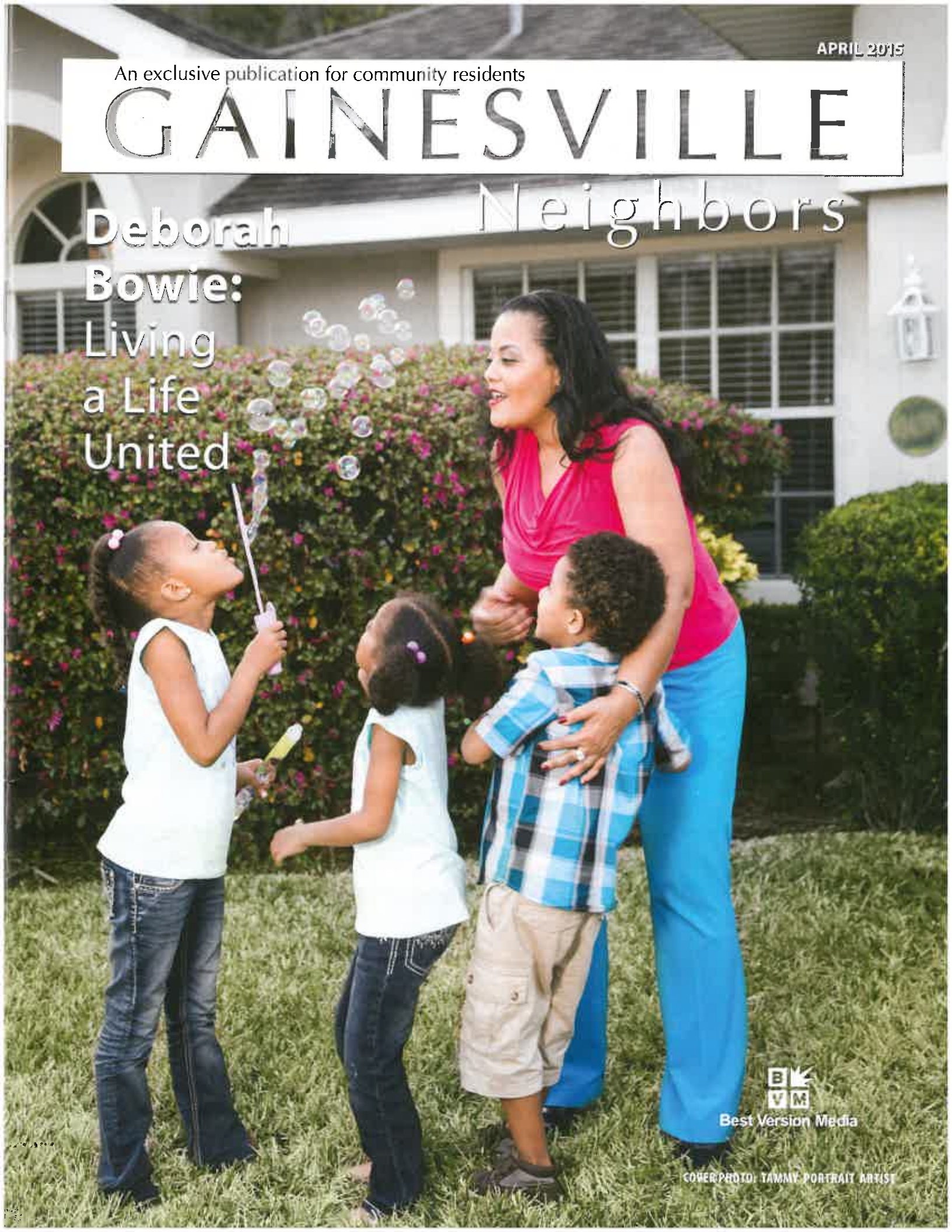


An exclusive publication for community residents

GAINESVILLE

Neighbors

**Deborah
Bowie:**
Living
a Life
United



Best Version Media

Deborah Bowie: Living a Life United

BY GEORGINA CHONG-YOU

President and CEO of the United Way of North Central Florida, Deborah V. Bowie, sat with us to share about life at the office and life at home.

Many people are lured to the city of Gainesville by a job position or the University of Florida. However, Deborah was brought here out of a necessity – a desperate necessity to help her autistic son. Deborah's son is her only boy in a set of triplets, Ryanne, Rain and Raymond, and at age two Raymond was diagnosed with Autism. After realizing there were no providers in her home town of Birmingham, Alabama, Deborah made it her mission find somewhere that did provide the services her son needed. "Oddly enough, many times you don't know what your community doesn't have until you find yourself needing it and for me, it was services for my son that I desperately needed but soon discovered there no providers in the entire Birmingham MSA. People find that hard to believe but it is the truth, and so it was with that discovery that I began my journey to find a community where I would have to rebuild my life around my son. (My daughters are not autistic and can go to school anywhere so I tried SW Georgia for a while since they had marginally better services for my son but I learned that my stay there would be shortened as the resources dried up after Raymond finished the pre-school program at the ARC). Thankfully, an opportunity at the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce came open, and I pounced! I learned Gainesville, home to world-class medical resources at UF Shands and North Florida Regional

Medical Center, among other facilities, had a growing autism network."

So, on nothing more than "faith and hope" in April 2013, Deborah moved to Gainesville and enrolled her son in a clinic and a year later an autism school opened. Raymond now attends that school full time. In addition, Raymond recently became the recipient of the McKay scholarship, which helps to defray the enormous cost of tuition for the school.

Deborah's triplets are now 6 years old, and she also has a soon-to-be 21-year-old college junior, Alexis, who attends school in New Orleans on a full academic scholarship. Soon after Deborah chose to make Gator Country her home, her mother, a registered nurse for 47 years, relocated to Gainesville in order to be close to Deborah and her grandchildren. She now works at North Florida Regional Medical Center. There are many things that are important to Deborah and her family, some of which are diversity, inclusion and acceptance. Deborah is the product of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and spiritually diverse home (my mother is a Brooklyn-born Jew with family roots in the Ukraine and my father has West Indian roots). The global environment of Gainesville is just as much a factor in my children's upbringing as their education.

Alongside receiving great fulfillment as a mother, Deborah's position as president and CEO of the United Way of North Central Florida brings tremendous fulfillment to her life as

well. The United Way of North Central Florida has a solid, respectable legacy and reputation in the community, the state and the nation. "UWNCF moved several years ago to an impact model in the industry, which basically means we have implemented a results-based accountability metrics system that makes the agencies who receive funding accountable for their results in ways the traditional United Way model overlooked. Several years ago, we conducted a series of strategic planning sessions and narrowed our impact needs to four major focus areas including education, income, health and immediate needs -- the impact of which is the basis for the accountability matrix. There are so many programs and services the United Way provides for, either in direct services or through the enormous work conducted by our partner agencies."

The United Way of North Central Florida offers a great deal to the community of Gainesville, and Deborah sees it as a blessing to not only be in a leadership role with United Way, but to also live in the city she calls a "global village". Deborah calls Gainesville a global village because "Gainesville is small but has amenities of communities three times its size! So, it's like living in a town where everyone knows and cares for each other, but where you can still find great Indian cuisine and BBQ, if you so desire. The plus is the central location and how easy it is to go just about anywhere in Florida and still be blessed to come back to the ease of Gainesville." Moving to Gainesville, she

PHOTOS BY TAMMY PORTRAIT ARTIST

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**United
Way**



**United Way
of North Central Florida**



Deborah Bowie

says, was the best decision she ever made.

While it is extremely busy being a working mom of triplets – a role that calls for the occasional quiet moments with a glass of wine in bed at the end of the day – Deborah is continually inspired by her children. They keep her grounded and her son Raymond inspires her to never stop hoping things will get better. “Children with disabilities actually have a unique ability to seed hope, and I live that everyday.”

This leads me to share Deborah’s favorite quote that she first heard from her high school teacher say. She would say: “There but for the grace of God, go I.” Deborah didn’t quite understand what it meant at the time, but as she matured and experienced many challenges in life, including the loss of her sister to a home-invasion homicide in 1994, she remembered those words and now completely understands that it’s God’s grace that has allowed her to be, to have, and hopefully always to grow from the sum of her experiences. “While many things in my life are beyond my control, how I respond to them is by grace...and the wisdom I learn.”

Deborah Bowie has certainly lived by the grace given to her to boldly face her challenges and graciously embrace her blessings as well.

For more information about how you can give to, donate or volunteer with the United Way of North Central Florida, please visit them at <http://www.unitedwayncfl.org/>.

