

I am an American We are One Nation

AD EXEC GIVING BACK TO COMMUNITY

Floridian, 91, sees no point in retiring as long as volunteering is available

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Each week, this series will introduce you to an exceptional American who unites, rather than divides, our communities. To read more about the American profiled here and more average Americans doing exceptional things, visit onenation.usatoday.com.



DOROTHY EDWARDS/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Myra Daniels, 91, is the founder of the Naples Philharmonic (now Artis-Naples) in Naples, Fla. “I wake up each day with something on my plate,” she says.

Location: Naples, Florida **Age:** 91 **Profession:** Advertising executive, creative consultant **Mission:** To do the most good I can with what I have

NAPLES, Fla. - When Myra Janco Daniels was young, her father asked her what she wanted to be.

Her answer: “In charge.”

For much of her life, Daniels has been precisely that, as a successful advertising executive, the driving force behind the creation of the Philharmonic Center for the Arts in Naples, Florida, now Artis-Naples, and most recently as a fundraiser for the Salvation Army’s new Fran Cohen Youth Center in East Naples.

At 91, Daniels has no intention of giving up her habit of taking the lead in charitable endeavors. The completion of the youth center, which will serve children who would otherwise come home from school to an empty house, is just weeks away. Now she has a few other projects, which she prefers to keep under wraps for now, on her to-do list.

“I wake up each day with something on my plate,” said Daniels, who moved to Southwest Florida’s Marco Island in 1979 after working in Indiana and Chicago.

She later moved to Pelican Bay, near the performing arts hall that was the culmination of her vision for a permanent home for the Naples/Marco Island Philharmonic.

She has since moved twice, each time giving up some of the art from her collection. “I’d rather see a kid go to college than buy another piece of art,” she said.

Staying active is a core belief. “I don’t think people should retire. You have to use your mind to live,” she said.

Having obtained everything she wants, Daniels now works on a volunteer basis. “There’s nothing I want for myself. I just want to be useful.” It’s a lesson she learned from her grandparents, immigrants from Romania.

“They taught me when you give, you get back so much more.”

Giving back is part of being an American, Daniels believes. “I’ve been blessed. Most of all I’ve tried to be a good citizen.”

She has advice for people looking to emulate her success. “Analyze yourself like you would a product or a plan. What are your strengths?”

And she has no plans to slow down. And to be in charge for the duration.

Q& A: MYRA DANIELS

What does it mean to you to be an American?

It means the opportunity to help build our country, the opportunity to help others. It means the opportunity to work the way I want to work. It’s a freedom. The freedom of America is very important to me. My grandparents immigrated from Romania. They came and they succeeded in America in every way. They learned the language. They worked. They gave as much as they got.

What moment touched and motivated you to launch this effort?

Knowing how many children are on the streets in Naples after school. There are 10,000. They’re latchkey kids. Their parents work. Knowing how much trouble they can get into. We have to support them. I think we’ll take some of them off the street. We won’t have all of them, but we’ll have several handfuls. Some of these kids never get encouragement. You have to encourage kids. We’re going to encourage them in the arts. We’re going to encourage them in the classroom.

What gives you hope or what concerns you?

What concerns me is we have never had so much confusion coming out of Washington. I have hope, incidentally. I think we need to stand behind those we have elected until we see where they are going. We have to pull together as a country. We are the best country in the world, in my experience, but we have some flaws we need to fix.

What do you hope to accomplish through your efforts?

I just hope I can add something to the community. I hope I can make it a better community, a happier community, a brighter community. When you look at these kids, you have the chance to mold minds. I have a lot of help, by the way. There are a lot of dedicated volunteers working on this.