

[SPOTLIGHT]



JOHN ANNIS

From NCO to Society of Fellows and Beyond

Honor, courage and commitment are the core values of the U.S. Marine Corps and so they define how a dedicated Marine thinks, acts and fights. Those qualities are woven into the DNA of retired Sergeant Major John Annis. But now, nearly 20 years post retirement, his mission is not military.

Today Annis is working to create meaningful intergenerational change in the areas of student success, family enrichment, social wellness and more. The tactics he uses are embedded in his title of senior vice president of collaboration and impact at Sarasota's Barancik Foundation.

MAKING AN IMPACT

In the Marines, impact meant finishing the mission. "It was relatively cut and dry. You recovered the mission or, if you didn't, you adjusted and adapted the best way you could," said Annis. In the fight to "strengthen the community from every angle," which is the focus of the Barancik Foundation, the 'mission' doesn't have to be complete to be impactful. But it does need to be collaborative.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership and collaboration are central to his work on all fronts, but Annis really lights up when talking about teacher recruitment and retention: one of three Barancik initiatives launched in 2018. "We got involved at the right time, because there seems to be public outrage about the way we underpay teachers," he said.

One success story is about helping to change his employers' views about capital investments. Initially, Charles and

Margery Barancik "didn't want to erect a structure just to put their names on a building," he said. "We outlined the types of things we could do, like affordable housing for teachers and hometown heroes," he explained. The result is that Lofts on Lemon, a 130-unit building with about 40 percent of the units reserved for teachers and other civil servants should break ground in the beginning of 2020.

GETTING FROM THERE TO HERE

Annis had just left the Marines when he applied for a job at the Herald-Tribune in 2003. "I knew that (Marine Sergeant Major) was a key leadership role with influence that went beyond the rank," said then publisher Diane McFarlin. He started in an entry-level position in the circulation department, but "within a short period of time was playing a key role on my leadership team," she said.

Starting anew after the Marines was hard, said Annis, but perhaps even more life altering were the two years he spent as an Aspen Institute Fellow. "It changed me as a person and how I think about the work that I do," he said. The fellowship experience was where Annis more fully let go of his "Marine armor" and became "more open-minded about the world and more able to see other people's perspectives and opinions," he said.

That openness has helped his philanthropy career thrive. But he's "always had a focus on the common good – whether it was the Marines, the Herald-Tribune, or the community at large," said McFarlin. "He is never without equanimity, but doesn't suffer fools gladly. And he has amazing radar. He detects instinctively when someone is motivated by deceit or self-interest."

BY EMILY LEINFUSS | PHOTO BY KIM COLLISTER