

Clearwater resident, Dr. Sharon Reid-Kane lives and breathes the arts, particularly performing arts, and arts education. She is Vice-President & Chief Education and Community Engagement Officer for Ruth Eckerd Hall. Dr. Reid-Kane has a resume that reflects her love of, and dedication to, public service and mission-driven work. She has served as a community relations specialist and educator with Pinellas County Schools, she served as Director of the United Way of Pinellas County, and she also served as President of Arts for a Complete Education (ACE) of Pinellas County.

I met Sharon when I held a “Meet and Greet” in Countryside, outside the library. Sharon happened to be riding her bike and stopped to listen in. She and I share a background in education and a love of service to children and families. After that initial meeting, Sharon gave me a tour of Ruth Eckerd Hall (REH), both behind the stage - and on the stage. What an experience! What a treasure and asset REH, and in particular their community engagement efforts, is in our community.

Hello Sharon,

Thank you for taking the time to answer a few questions to let readers know a little more about you and the important and impactful work you do with Ruth Eckerd Hall.

My pleasure! Thank you so much for the invitation...

So, are you a Clearwater native? If not, tell us a little about how you’ve come to make Clearwater and Pinellas County your home.

Like most others here, I am not a native Southerner. I grew up in the Northeast (hint; Go, Steelers!) but also had the wonderful experience/s of living in many places including spending summers in Florida so the move here was natural.

Congratulations on recently earning your Doctorate degree! What is your education background and did you always know arts and education would be your career path?

Thank you! I honestly never had any plans to pursue a doctoral degree. I earned my master’s in arts and academic interdisciplinary education and some valued professors encouraged me to continue my studies. After lots of careful consideration and quite honestly several “what am I doing?!” moments, I chose to jump in! I love learning and growing, and in addition to relishing the personal challenge I do feel it is my responsibility as an educator to lead by example and take hold of any opportunity to live the philosophy of life-long learning. I wanted to show my students (my “kids”) and staff the true meaning of that phrase in action!

Why do you think it's important for children, in particular, to be exposed to the performing arts?

I can easily reference the loads and loads of research that quantify the impact of participation in artistic experiences on a child's intellectual development and ability to learn – there is no debating those facts. I believe the bigger conversation, though, is about how art can help a child find their own voice and learn to respect the voices of others. Art gives us a channel for expression and appreciation and can literally help children grow into who they are ultimately going to be...

Did you participate in performing arts when you were young? First play?

The short answer is a resounding YES! I had the great fortune of exposure to the arts as a direct participant (my first performance was dancing in "The Nutcracker" when I was 4 years old) and enthusiastic audience member for as long as I can remember – ballet, theater, music – I loved it all and still do!

Do you still perform? Any desire or history in participating in community theater?

One of the things I truly love about my amazing staff – who are all incredibly talented in their own rights – is that in our professional roles, we leave the stages and spotlights to our students, our "kids". Our work revolves around making *them* shine, it isn't about us. That being said, I do hold live private concerts in my car frequently on my way to and from work!

Can you explain what you do as Vice-President & Chief Education and Community Engagement Officer?

In the most succinct terms, I am responsible for the direction of Ruth Eckerd Hall's onsite and offsite education and community engagement programs and initiatives.

What might a typical work day look like for you? Or are there really no "typical" days?

The arts are, by nature, ever-changing which makes the administration of artistic endeavors very fluid, as well. No two days are alike – which I love!

You told me you have the most joyful job. What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

Working in a not-for-profit, mission-based environment is a true gift. It is hard work – managing resources to meet ever-changing needs – but the rewards are almost indescribable. One of my favorite anecdotes involves a teenage student of mine who was struggling in school, both socially and academically. They stopped in my doorway early one Saturday morning before their theater class and I joked about having them get up so early on the weekend:

“I’m so happy to see you! We must be doing something right for you to get here so early, right?!”

“Miss Sharon, I love it here. It’s the only place where I can be who I really am.”

That was a good day...

My staff and I have hundreds of those stories. We are so fortunate to be reminded regularly that this work we believe in so strongly matters. I am humbled every day that I get to do what I do.

You’ve probably met thousands of famous entertainers. You may not want to name a favorite, but can you share a fun anecdote about someone? Something surprising?

I’m always touched by how gracious artists can be in working with my students - my “kids”. Schedules permitting, they are usually more than willing to give back in some way and those entertainers will always hold a special place in my heart (and on my playlists) – because of it!

Ruth Eckerd Hall is expanding their footprint in Clearwater; they were chosen to manage our new amphitheater in Coachman Park. What types of education and/or community engagement opportunities can you envision happening at the new venue?

We are incredibly honored to take on this new responsibility. My team and I are excited to offer new initiatives there – picture “Shakespeare in the Park”-type events, while also giving a new platform for existing programs, such as our SchoolTime series’ shows for local children during the school day. Can you IMAGINE field trips to experience live, curriculum-supporting performances in that beautiful setting? Those will be special days – no question!

What are you most excited about?

I try to remind myself each day not to dwell in the past – look back just long enough to learn and take the lessons that you need with you - then move ahead. So, what am I most excited about? TOMORROW!

The REH website, rutherfordhall.com, has a page and multiple links to a variety of education programs. Ranging from chorus, to private lessons and workshops, to online literature, and scholarship and tuition assistance there is an abundance of opportunities. There seems to be something for everyone! Is there an age range that you focus on?

We pride ourselves in working with students of ALL ages and abilities!

Is there something you are working on, or would like to work on, that is not yet offered?

We are *always* working on something new – stay tuned!

Is now the time to check out the REH website to register for summer programs?

YES! Our summer camps and classes will be enrolling soon and fill quickly – check it out!

<https://www.rutheckerdhall.com/classes-and-private-lessons>

Is there anything else you think we should know about you and the work you do at REH?

I'm always thankful for the opportunity to share how grateful I am for the position I have at the Hall and in this community. It is a responsibility I take very seriously on behalf of my students - my "kids", their families, my staff, and our supporters. I can only hope to live up to the faith that others have placed in me.

Light and Quick:

Favorite restaurant?

Just one?!

Favorite sports team?

See earlier comment referencing my Steelers - and don't forget our awesome Tampa Bay Lightning!

Hidden treasure in Clearwater?

Hardly "hidden" – but every sunrise and sunset takes my breath away...

What do you like most about Clearwater?

I love how surprising this city is – I often think new residents may initially underestimate us and love to see the revelation as all of the amazing aspects of Clearwater are discovered.

Any suggestions on how Clearwater could improve?

We have so much to be thankful for in this beautiful city, but there is work to be done. My prayer would be for everyone who is able to find a cause that resonates with their heart and give what

they can however they can toward that issue. I'm a firm believer that every little bit helps and we are stronger together.

Are you familiar with Theater eXceptional? "Clearwater-based Blue Butterfly Production - Theater eXceptional, a nonprofit organization that uses the performing arts to raise awareness, break stigmas and provide professional education and performance opportunities for adults with disabilities." Do you offer programs or classes for people with disabilities? Maybe even hearing or visually impaired? Are they simply "mainstreamed" into any class you offer?

Yes – I'm very familiar with Theatre eXceptional and applaud their wonderful work. The key to what we do is to always have students in an environment where they are most comfortable – feeling secure is vital to artistic exploration. For that reason, we often share and refer students just as we do with Blossom Montessori School for the Deaf, LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, The ARC Tampa Bay, Creative Clay, and other local organizations – their students come to us, our Teaching Artists go to them, and we all work together for the greater good.

Thank you so much Sharon. I'm happy to know you and promote the important work you do.

So happy to know you, as well – and thank you for your service to our City!