

Meet Paula Grisanti, chairman and CEO of the National Stem Cell Foundation

Profiles March 26, 2018



FAST FACTS

Hometown – Ashland, Kentucky

Family – Husband Michael and three grown sons.

Best vacation spot – Colorado or Michigan

Favorite album or band – Currently listening to Kristin Chenoweth, St. Paul and The Broken Bones and Linda Eder, just as likely to be listening to Broadway or Etta James.

Coffee, tea or other – A cup of coffee in the morning,

iced green tea all day long.

Medical News: Were you in leadership roles early on?

Paula Grisanti: Yes, in business and on boards. Sold my full-time dental practice to join Jewish Hospital's management team in the mid 80's, owned and operated brand licensing and corporate gift company, chaired several committees and boards for non-profit organizations.

MN: Tell me about your first job out of college.

PG: I went straight from college to dental school at the University of Louisville. I moved to Louisville not expecting to practice here – or in Kentucky. I met my husband, Michael, about three months into my freshman year; we were married a year and a half later.

MN: How did you end up at the National Stem Cell Foundation (NSCF)?

PG: I'm one of the founding members of the Foundation, as are other members of our Board. We came together 15 years ago to form a nonprofit that would advance research with the potential to treat or cure diseases and conditions that affect millions of people worldwide.

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Stem cell therapies have been saving lives since the 1950's – you just knew them as bone marrow (stem cell) transplants. Now you know them as immunotherapy, or a way to repair heart damage after a heart attack, or a way to regenerate cartilage damaged by injury or age – or as potential therapies for MS, Parkinson's and ALS. The ability to harness the power of your own cells to regenerate or repair damaged tissue launched an entirely new field of medicine, regenerative medicine, that forever changed the way we look at disease and injury.

Today, research, education and advocacy are the three platforms of NSCF. We partner with large national organizations to co-fund high potential research projects and clinical trials, fund an innovative national scholarship program for middle school science teachers inspiring the next generation of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) pioneers and fund a program that helps children of limited means participate in clinical trials for rare diseases.

MN: Describe the culture or the organization.

PG: We adopted a unique, full collaboration business model several years ago and believe strongly that partnership is key to progress. We partner on virtually every project we fund to double the impact of donor dollars.

MN: Tell me about your management style.

PG: I run the day-to-day operations of NSCF and interact with our researchers and educators nationwide, but I couldn't do it without the team we have in place. My job is to hire the best people for the job, empower them to do what they do best and stay out of the way.

MN: What advice do you give to graduating college students?

PG: Determination and perseverance mean at least as much as how much you know.

MN: What might somebody say in a meeting that, to you, sounds like nails on a chalkboard?

PG: It can't be done.

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