

Q & A

Q & A with Sheila Buchanan



The Events and Meetings Coordinator for Primerus, Sheila Buchanan, was born at Scott Field in Illinois where her father was an officer in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Sheila earned her high school diploma from Marywood Academy in Grand Rapids, Michigan where she was president of her class. An alumna of Aquinas College, she has been active on the community service front for many years, serving on the board of the local United Way chapter, as president of the St. John's Home agency, as president of the Lawyers' Wives of Grand Rapids, while also assisting and supporting Habitat for Humanity projects, the Nature Conservancy, and the Grand Rapids Foundation. Sheila and her husband, Jack, have been married for 61 years, and have three children, ten grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. The couple shares a love of boating and the great outdoors and spends the summer months in the Grand Rapids area and the winters in Arizona where they have had a home for nearly 30 years.



Sheila and Jack at their winter home in Arizona

Q: What was your first job?

A: During high school and college, I worked in sales in a women's clothing store with a salary plus commission which none of the other staff were given. I have no idea why, but I also got a discount on buying for myself.

Q: What was/is your favorite job?

A: I have enjoyed working on event planning for Primerus and had done it before for the fund-raising events at the Grand Rapids Art Museum. I have met so many great people at our events and gained perspectives on so many cultures. And Jack and I have always loved to travel.

Q: Who was your chief mentor and how did he or she influence your career?

A: I would really have to give Jack credit for that as he always encouraged me to go for whatever I wanted to do, be it real estate purchasing and management, which I have done for the 61 years of our marriage, to working with Primerus members. We have never been bored in our marriage.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

A: I found this poem:

A small boy heard the ocean roar,
There are secrets on my distant shore
But beware my child the ship's bells wail,
Wait not too long to start the sail.
So quickly come and go the years
And a young adult stands a beach – with fears.
Come on, come on, the ocean cussed,
Time passes on, oh sail you must.
Now it's business in middle-aged prime

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And maybe tomorrow there'll be time,
Now is too soon – it's raining today.
Gone, all gone-years are eaten away.

An old man looks out, still feeling the lure
Yet he'll suffer the pain than go for the cure.
The hair is white, the steps with care.

So, all too soon the secrets are buried
Along with him and regrets he carried
And it's not for loss of secrets he cried
But rather because he'd never tried.

Q: What is one thing you would like to learn to do?

A: I would love to be fluent in Spanish and French. I had a French minor in college for a bit and took Spanish, but never gained fluency in either. And I took a class in Italian. I would love to be like so many of our members who are fluent in several languages.

Q: What is your proudest career achievement?

A: I really can't say that I am proudest of one or another, but I have had great satisfaction in having so many projects that have gone well and in having relationships with my family and friends that I treasure.

Q: What other career path might you have chosen?

A: I started college with the idea of joining the female family tradition of being an educator. But once I tried some business projects, I was much more interested in those.

Q: What is your most treasured material possession?

A: I can't say I am overly sentimental, but I do have a wooden rocking chair that has been in my family for many years and I was rocked in as a child. It's in our bedroom now.



Sheila enjoying the view from her perch on board the family boat in the popular northern Michigan resort town of Harbor Springs.



On the shores of a scenic lake in Arizona, Sheila and Jack are pictured with their granddaughter, Marlee.

Q: What is your happiest childhood memory?

A: I always lived in a city and was born on an Army base at the start of World War II. But as my father was overseas, my mother and I lived during the war with my grandmother on her farm and I spent almost every summer of my childhood on that farm with a lot of my cousins and aunts and uncles. I remember it all as such a happy time.

Q: What is your favorite movie and book?

A: Again, I'm not a favorite chooser, but I love any movies that had Katherine Hepburn, Jimmy Stewart or Jessica Tandy in them. That's going way back. And books are usually historical biographies or novels and especially books on the Civil War or World War II.

Q: What is the most awe-inspiring place you have visited?

A: Natural wonders like the Grand Canyon or the Matterhorn and so many places along the ocean and definitely the Great Lakes. I have visited awe-inspiring cities like Rome, Athens and Paris, which are wonderful, but I love the natural awesome places best.

Q: What are your favorite leisure time pursuits?

A: We are boaters and spend a lot of time in the summer on Lake Michigan swimming and enjoying the beautiful water, islands, and shoreline. And Arizona is a place I like to hike, bike, and enjoy.

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Q: What is your favorite famous or inspirational quote?

A: I like a quote from Abe Lincoln: “America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.”

Q: Who is on your guest list for the ideal dinner party?

A: I love our family dinners with our children and grandchildren, who are so full of ideas and hopes that they are inspirational. But there are so many of our Primerus members that I can think of and won't name that never fail to bring great conversations and fresh perspectives that make a great dinner party, too.

Q: What are the top three items on your bucket list?

A: A full-on evening of the northern lights in either Norway or Iceland. Swimming in bioluminescent water in the Maldives (before they disappear). Living to see climate change brought under control so my grandchildren can have the joy of living on a beautiful, livable planet.



The Buchanans with their daughter, Jane Beckering, a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan.