

## EXECUTIVE INC.

### ARIZONA CANCER NONPROFIT EXEC LEADING STATEWIDE EXPANSION EFFORT



Debbie DiCarlo loves to eat local. Her favorite Valley restaurant right now is Lovecraft, a Phoenix brewery.

JIM POULIN | PBJ

BY ERIN EDGEEMON  
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For five years Debbie DiCarlo has led Cancer Support Community Arizona, an organization that provides a range of free emotional, educational and exercise programs for cancer patients, families and caregivers.

Just prior to taking the job as CEO, DiCarlo took a break from the nonprofit world to build out her skill sets at a large corporation – in the Allstate claims department in California.

During that time, her best friend, Helen, was diagnosed with cancer and would talk to DiCarlo about this place she would go to in Phoenix for yoga, drumming and mindfulness classes.

"In my mind, because I hadn't seen it, I really thought it was like an exercise studio," DiCarlo said.

Soon after, DiCarlo, a native of Phoenix, was looking to move back to the Valley, and within a week about five or six different friends sent her the job posting for the CEO position at Cancer Support Community Arizona. It was same place Helen, who died from her illness, visited for classes and support.

DiCarlo had experience working for nonprofits dealing with immigration,

## DEBBIE DICARLO

**TITLE:** CEO

**COMPANY:** Cancer Support Community Arizona

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree in English and history, Loyola Marymount University; master's degree in counseling, California State University at Dominguez Hills; and master's degree in theological pastoral studies from Loyola University at New Orleans.

**HOW DO YOU DE-STRESS?**

I exercise. In the middle of the night, I will find myself doing mindfulness meditation.

**FAVORITE BOOK?** Wally Lamb's "I Know This Much is True"

Debbie DiCarlo talks about what keeps her motivated at [PhoenixBusinessJournal.com](http://PhoenixBusinessJournal.com)

foster care, sex trafficking and domestic violence, but she never saw herself working for a cancer organization.

"What really intrigued me and sold me on it was the fact that the organization itself was shifting or broadening its focus and ability to be able to focus on serving all of Arizona," she said.

She found that the nonprofit wanted to expand and serve more low-income or under-resourced communities, which have a higher mortality rate from cancer.

And that growth is happening. The nonprofit is planning an Oct. 8-9 grand opening of its northern Arizona office at 914 N. San Francisco St., Suite 6 in Flagstaff.

During the pandemic, the nonprofit also worked quickly to provide its services online. That will likely continue after pandemic as many patients are immunocompromised, and it allows the nonprofit to serve more people across the state.

Cancer Support Community Arizona is headquartered in a 1908 restored Craftsman-style house at 360 E. Palm Lane in downtown Phoenix.

**Talk about how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted people being screened for cancer. How has that impacted your organization?** It is a whole other epidemic in the making. I am not sure if the health care system is going to be able to bear it all because it is already so stressed. There has been quite a bit of research done on the number of screenings that were missed and delayed. Screenings for the under-resourced is always going to be an area of importance, and then you throw into that same category, all of the folks that have missed screenings. It just adds up. There are plans in place to do catch-up.

We're working hard to try to educate people to say absolutely [even seniors need to come in for their screenings despite the pandemic]. Because if a cancer can be caught earlier, it is more survivable and there's easier treatment.

**What's something not many people know about you?** My husband [Richard, now retired] and both of my boys are police officers. My maiden name is Martinez, so my dad is 100% Latino, but people see me and they see my blonde hair and blue eyes and they presume what that is. I've got a decent command of Spanish. I'm certainly not fluent. That can be a kind of fun little trick to have in my pocket.

**What is the toughest part of your job?** We do get really close to our families but because cancer is what it is, we do have folks that we lose. I think it is trying to make sure that we are truly a community for our staff and the folks who lose somebody. Creating a space for people to walk through that grief. It is trying to balance running a business with the reality of ensuring that we are always authentic to the message that we are a community.

**What is the best part of my job?** The same thing – our families. I think the strength and resiliency. Cancer has this ability that if you allow it to it reshapes your life. You reprioritize. It makes you become laser focused on things that have meaning. It becomes a special magic sauce.

There are folks who have been part of our community from day one and they still come back and visit. One of the original owners of the house [on Palm Lane] is still a participant. He is a volunteer and leads book clubs for us. It is people like him that keep gas in the engine.