

Palm Beach Daily News

Royal Poinciana Plaza's new manager has deep Palm Beach roots



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Lilly Leas Ferreira, granddaughter of Lilly Pulitzer, was recently named general manager of the Royal Poinciana Plaza, which has undergone a resurgence in the past few years. [Damon Higgins/palmbeachdailynews.com]

By John Nelander / Special to the Daily News

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Lilly Leas Ferreira is granddaughter of Lilly Pulitzer

Lilly Leas Ferreira remembers coming to The Royal Poinciana Plaza and playhouse with her mother when she was a girl growing up on the island's north side. She returned on Monday in a new role — as the plaza's general manager.

"It had this legacy to it," said Ferreira, whose mother is Minnie Pulitzer McCluskey and grandmother was designer and Palm Beach icon Lilly Pulitzer. "It was always an iconic property, but it needed a little bit of love over the last few years. So, to watch this organization come in and transform it completely has been really exciting."

Her deep ties to the community are touted by upper management at Massachusetts-based WS Development, which purchased the plaza in 2014.

"Lilly is an active member of the community and having been born and raised on the island, will be able to interact with our customers in a truly authentic way," said Samantha Perry David, chief operating officer.

In a family with an entrepreneurial bent, Ferreira has followed suit, opening up her own public relations firm after graduating from college with a finance degree and then selling it to attend the University of Florida for an accelerated MBA program.

From there she jumped into a leadership development program at NextEra Energy, parent company of Florida Power & Light, where she said she focused on "project management skills."

"This job brings together so wonderfully my background in PR, having strength in finance and managing budgets accordingly, and the project management piece. I get to put a little bit of all of that together," she said. "I think having my own business and an entrepreneurial background is well suited for this role as well. And I'm just a fan of the plaza — so how lucky am I that I get to come here every day for work?"

The classic 1950s shopping center, designed by architect John Volk, underwent a major facelift under the direction of Up Markets, a division of WS Development. It has attracted a full slate of shops, popups, restaurants, fitness centers and offices. Retail space is full this season while two office spaces are available.

In addition, plaza management has focused on community events to keep families coming with the goal of having them spend more time browsing through the stores and eating at the restaurants.

Ferreira walks the plaza four times a day to be as supportive of tenants as possible. Her long-term goal is to make sure it has the right mix, and maintain close ties with the community by getting involved in charity work and attending Chamber of Commerce events.

"Fashion is always going to be a big part of this," she said. "Food is a big part, so making sure we have best-in-class restaurants, and fitness is growing more and more important. Beauty is always going to be a piece and so are events for the family.

"There's a new generation in Palm Beach — lots of families — and we want to make sure we're servicing that part of the community."

Her life is a balancing act with her new job and a new baby — she and her husband, Sean, had a daughter four months ago.

"When I'm not here at the office I'm with her. But a lot of what I do is being out on the water. My husband and I love to dive and fish, and I've got tons of family here so I spend as much time with them as I possibly can.

"We always drive past the beach when I'm visiting my family and I feel like this season we've seen more visitors — people taking the [Worth Avenue] clock tower picture — than I have in the past.

"Palm Beach is a popular spot with families and young professionals. It seems like people who are seasonal are staying here longer, and then we have more and more visitors coming down as well."