

Young Professional of the Week

Ask A Torchbearer Anything ...



Who: Karissa Armstrong, 31
What: Media Director, Board Vice President, All About Omaha

Karissa Armstrong

By Lisa Martin / Photo by Eric Gonzalez

Karissa Armstrong is a small-town girl with a big news crush, which started during her college years in Lincoln being a Co-Editor in the All-American Ball. “was really my first experience into all that Omaha had to offer,” said Armstrong, “I really fell in love with the city at that point, and I just knew I would come back.”

Originally from Minden, Neb. (south of Kearney), Armstrong graduated UNL with a degree in broadcast journalism, then moved into advertising in San Diego. But family and friends did, indeed, bring her back to the Midwest, and now she’s a familiar face in the Omaha scene, actively involved with All About Omaha, a charitable and social organization aimed at keeping young professionals engaged in the city.

She’s still down with Armstrong at the Redonch’s Pedestrian Bridge to discuss wedding center pieces, the Torchlight Ball, and the city’s innage — a conversation that was less interview and more Omaha-lover.

Shout!: With a major in broadcast journalism, did you expect to get involved in marketing?

Karissa Armstrong: No, I didn’t. I kind of expected that I would go into the news field. I did an internship at KETV when I was in college down at Lincoln, and I would go out with the field reporters on the newscast and follow them around. I thought that I eventually wanted to do that and then work my way up to anchor. But I didn’t have

it in me at that point, and I just couldn’t do it. I didn’t really know what else I wanted to do with my degree. I had no idea that media planning and buying, which I currently do, really even existed — it wasn’t anything that was taught to me in school at the time, so it was something that was self-taught, that I really stumbled into.

How did you get involved with All About Omaha?

“I’ve been involved [in community activities] your since I can remember, even when I was a young child. It was always student council, running for senior class president, things like that. I’ve always been involved some way or another. I was really involved in the advertising community here, and when I came back to Omaha, I bring new to the city. I wanted to get involved, but I didn’t really know how. I started asking around itself, and some of my fellow coworkers were board members of All About Omaha; they started talking about it and I thought it sounded like a great organization to be a part of — both giving back civically, out volunteering, and being able to see all the city had to offer with entertainment, culture, nightlife, the arts.

What kind of events does All About Omaha organize?

“Our biggest event is the Torchlight Ball, and that’s coming up on April 30. Our beneficiary this year is Winemex Circle Educational Programs; they focus on providing underserved/legged children with educational opportunities, better equipment, better facilities, after-school programs — anything like that, bettering the educational experience in Omaha schools that can’t afford it. We’re currently trying to bring

on corporate sponsors, ticket sales, silent auction, donations — all of that money goes directly to Winemex Circle.

The Torchlight Ball is a great night — it’s a great night to get dressed up, something you don’t do all the time. It’s being around your peers and other leaders in the community. It’s a night to celebrate All About Omaha and Winemex Circle, to celebrate all that we’ve done throughout the year to help... There’s dinner and dancing and cocktails and a large silent auction. It’s a nice way to end the big fundraising push for the beneficiary, though our relationship still goes on with beneficiaries we’re working with — we still volunteer with them on an ongoing basis and assist them in whatever they need.

Is All About Omaha primarily a fundraising organization?

I would say it’s both a fundraising and a social group. We have monthly happy hours, so that if you’re new to town or just want to get out there and network, we do those types of things. We also try to have a volunteer activity at least once a month. We did a Habitat for Humanity build this month with some board members. I think it’s a good balance of both. We’ll go to Omaha Royals games or Coughlin basketball games, but on the flip side, too, we’re very philanthropic and we do like to give back to the community.

What do you find personally satisfying about being involved with such an organization?

“I’ve always been told that I’m a bit like my father. He’s very social and networks a lot, he’s well-known, well-liked, always out and about, serving on different boards, trying to give back. I think that’s probably the biggest thing. I’ve

been blessed in so many ways — it’s important to give back and be conscious of that... Family and friends also make it easy [to be involved]. Especially when you’re new to something or if it’s a new organization, you know, it’s really hard to do it by yourself. I think that’s what was nice for me with All About Omaha — I joined itself and I was fortunate enough to have my coworkers, who were board members at the time, and they guided me and introduced me to the right people and set that in motion.

Being new to Omaha, what engages you about it? What do you love?

“Omaha is honestly one of the best-kept secrets in my mind... It’s beautiful and it’s cool and it’s a smaller size of everything. I lived in California for seven years and people thought I was insane for moving back to Nebraska... But I think Omaha’s awesome, especially the Old Market area, which is one of my favorites, just to see it growing [in-evolving], like with the new stadium, it’s so awesome to see. There are so many great industries here and so many great professionals here and that’s what makes the city grow. Omaha is such a great community, too — they get behind it and they support [that growth].

But outsiders — Californians, New Yorkers — still see Omaha as a cornfield. What can we do to change that image?

I don’t know if I want to [laugh]. I think that once people get here and they experience it for themselves, then they know. Then they’re like, “Oh WOW!” It’s a great place to raise a family, have a professional career, go out and entertain, etc., it’s just awesome. There’s always something to do... It’s a really great city. ■