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CEO Lisa Fiorentino: Groton Hill Music Feels Like A 38-Year-Old Startup

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Lisa Fiorentino may be CEO, but she is the first to point out that this tremendous accomplishment that is Groton Hill Music Center was made possible by the efforts of so many others.

‘Groton Hill Is Already Changing Lives — One At A Time’

by Barbara Scofidio

Little could Lisa Fiorentino have known almost 15 years ago, when she took a part-time position as Director of Finance at what was then known as Indian Hill Music Center in Littleton, how fortuitous that decision would be. Now the CEO of Groton Hill Music Center,

she has overseen the organization’s move to its new home in Groton, a spectacular 126,000-square-foot music education and performance venue, and just last week witnessed the grand opening of its 1,000-seat Concert Hall. That’s almost the same size as Tanglewood’s Seiji Ozawa Hall, and in addition, the back wall opens up in warmer weather to accommodate an additional 1,000 seats on the lawn.

Lisa might be at the top of the organizational chart but is the first to point out that this tremendous accomplishment was made possible by the efforts of so many others.

“We have a large group of incredibly dedicated, hardworking people and have worked to maintain many really strong relationships. In 2014, we were approached with the idea of this opportunity. We were being watched as an organization for what we could do, and we had shown that we could make it through hard times and we had been doing fabulous things for the community while also making sure that the foundation was solid.”

Groton Hill Music became a startup, in a sense, when the decision was made to move to Groton and build the new center. “I call us a 38-year-old startup. We’re in that mode,” she says. “When we got this opportunity, we were pinching ourselves. It’s bold, it’s ambitious. But we didn’t just go and say, ‘Yes, we’re going to do this.’ A lot of forethought went into this.”

Personally, she enjoys being challenged. “I’ve always been driven and had a strong work ethic, I’ve always been a perfectionist. I’m the kind of person who needs to be intellectually challenged. It’s about taking it step by step, looking at each piece, and seeing a path forward and what you want to have happen, then little by little moving in that direction. And remaining nimble so that if something happens, or something doesn’t go the way you want—like a pandemic hitting in the middle of your growth plan—you figure out how to adjust and do the best that you can.”

Her former career had prepared her for this, having worked as Vice President of Finance and Administration and Chief Accounting Officer of NetScout Systems in Westford for 10 years, helping that organization through its growth phase. An M.B.A. from Bentley University and B.S. in Business Administration from Merrimack College had helped to get her to that point.

She had stepped away from the corporate world to spend more time with her two young children when her husband, Joe, saw an ad for the part-time Indian Hill position in *The Groton Herald*.

The fact that she understands the challenges faced by working mothers has given her an inherent understanding of her employees’ needs. As she says, “I had my time, and now this is their time.” It’s also serendipitous that, at the time in her life when her career has been most demanding, her children are now adults, 26 and 22.

“I feel like I started at Indian Hill at the time when I needed to be with my kids and it wasn’t as high-stress of a role at the time—which was ok because I didn’t need that at that time. And now, I feel like all this happened for a reason.”

One of the first steps her organization took when it decided to grow was to put its values on paper. “We knew that as you grow, it gets harder to maintain who you are. We want to be a warm and welcoming organization where everyone is accepted, respected, valued. We want to have vibrant experiences, meaningful connections. We put all of that down so when we started to become a bigger organization bringing in thousands of people who knew nothing about us, we could remain true to our culture. You want to maintain what got you here. People love this organization. It’s incredible to me how people feel so ingrained in this organization—it’s a wonderful thing.”

The new school, with 35 classrooms, and the 300-seat Meadow Hall opened in September but the culmination of years of work was the sold-out opening of the Concert Hall on January 21, with a performance by the Vista Philharmonic Orchestra made all the more fabulous by the hall’s outstanding acoustics.

For Lisa, it was an unforgettable evening. “It was like a dream in some ways. I was hugging so many people. You plan for it for so long. You could feel the enthusiasm. I was feeding off of everyone else’s energy. People were walking in beaming. They were coming to opening night of our orchestra in this fabulous place and they all felt like they were part of it in a way that was much more than just going to a concert. They’ve all helped us to get there and supported us in so many ways—they’re part of who we are.”

A 23-year resident of Groton, Lisa understands the role that this performing arts venue holds in the future of her town, as it is slowly being transformed into a destination with big names like country music artist LeAnn Rimes taking the stage later this year. “We have a responsibility with this incredible gift, and I don’t take that lightly. We have to make sure we do everything we can do to support the community. There are people coming from all over, and I want to see Groton benefit from us being here.”

In the end, she knows that Groton Hill is already changing individuals’ lives—one at a time. “When I was in the corporate world and doing business-to-business, you didn’t feel like you were making a difference in people’s lives. But here, every day, I see people just lighting up. Whether it’s a student who’s learning to play, or the musicians themselves, or a concertgoer, or a senior who’s coming in for a visit, what we do here changes lives.”