

# OCEAN DRIVE

## 6 Influential Women Who Are Leading the Charitable Charge in the Magic City & Beyond

By Katie Jackson | May 1, 2017 | [People Feature](#)

From a top TV personality to fierce entrepreneurs and stylish philanthropists, six of Miami's leading ladies have one thing in common: they are on a mission to encourage and empower others—not just in the 305, but across the globe.

### KAROLÍNA KURKOVÁ

The Czech supermodel has conquered the catwalk, strutting her stuff for the Victoria's Secret fashion show and landing countless campaigns for high-end fashion houses like Chanel and Louis Vuitton. Now, the blonde beauty balances modeling, motherhood, and giving back.



Asymmetric red-plaid knit dress, Stella McCartney (\$797). [theoutnet.com](http://theoutnet.com).

### **What charities are you involved with right now?**

I work with [Feeding America](#) and [amfAR](#) [The Foundation for AIDS Research]. I did a campaign with Anna Wintour and a few female designers where we created products that were sold on [Shopbop.com](#). All of the proceeds were given to moms in third-world countries who have HIV.

### **How do you balance your career and personal life?**

It's a learning process; having kids forces you to have balance. I am constantly learning how to manage my time more efficiently. I pay very close attention to nutrition and try to take care of myself. But my kids come first, because children really need that guidance and a lot of love and attention.

### **Your childhood is not what people might expect.**

Growing up in a small town [in the Czech Republic] I got a lot of attention, but not in a good way. People would point at my long legs and stare at me. I never wore short skirts or shorts; I was always in pants trying to hide them. I was kind of insecure. I never thought of myself as a beautiful girl or that I could be a model.

### **When was your first big break?**

At [14 years old], a friend of mine asked me if she could take pictures of me. And then, without telling me, she sent them to an agency. They called and said they would like to meet me in person. On one hand I was like, Oh my God, yes! and on the other, I wanted to kill my friend because she didn't ask me. But if she had, I probably would have told her no, and I wouldn't be where I am today.

### **Philanthropy philosophy:**

We are a part of this planet, and we all need to help and empower others.

## **ARLENE CHAPLIN**

YogArt co-founder and Pérez Art Museum Miami Board of Trustees member Arlene Chaplin has made it her mission to fuse art, philanthropy, and fun in the Magic City.



Asymmetric dress, Dior (price on request). *Miami Design District, 162 NE 39th St., 305-576-4632.*

Jewelry, *Chaplin's own*

### **What drove you to become so involved in the community?**

From an early age, I saw my parents getting involved with and caring about the city. My dad was one of the first developers in Brickell, and he also dreamed of people staying, living, and working in downtown. So being a part of PAMM is amazing for me because he always felt like our city needed an arts and cultural center and that it helps to create a community.

### **How do you find balance with all of your projects?**

Yoga, which is why I started YogArt. It's exercise, but it helps your heart and soul, and I wanted to share that experience with others.

### **YogArt went from a two-times-a-year event to a monthly ritual connecting the community. How does that make you feel?**

The heart of YogArt has always been about love. My two partners, Lee Brian Schragger and Dawn Feinberg, and myself all have something to share, but it's all rooted in love and positive energy. And having [YogArt] events that people look forward to is incredibly rewarding. We're planning on expanding to New York—stay tuned!

### **What has been your biggest struggle?**

The number-one priority in my life is my children. I'm a mom first, then a wife, then hopefully a philanthropist. I want to be very loving and have an open relationship with my children, yet set guidelines and direct them on a great path. I think that if you give children good guidelines, then it's a gift to the entire world, because having healthy children is very important for all of us.

**Philanthropy philosophy:** I always try to be the best person I can possibly be, and I apply that to every aspect of my life.

## **LISA PETRILLO**

As CBS4's lifestyle and entertainment reporter, Lisa Petrillo infuses our lives with glitz and glamour. Here, she talks about making it in the television industry while encouraging young girls along the way.



Dolly mesh-paneled dress, Stella McCartney (\$992). [theoutnet.com](http://theoutnet.com). Jewelry and shoes, Petrillo's own

### **How did you get your first big break?**

I knew Julio Iglesias very well through a family friend. At the time, the competing station was promoting an exclusive interview with him. I went to my news director and said, "I can get you an exclusive with Julio Iglesias at his house. I can show you what his bedroom looks like!" So off we went, and lo and behold, it was on the 11 o'clock news that night as the big exclusive.

### **What's been your biggest career challenge?**

There's the challenge of being a mom and juggling my career. In the beginning I was part time, because I wanted to be with my kids. I even turned down an offer in LA that was going to have me in a big show, but that meant red carpets every night and not being home. I knew I wouldn't be happy doing that.

### **How has being a woman played a role in your career?**

In the beginning, it was hard. There were people who saw a young girl and didn't want to take [me] seriously. But the power of the woman is so strong, and I think once you prove that you can do it just as well as a man, all bets are off.

### **What charities are you involved with now?**

I am the honorary chair of [Debbie's Dream Foundation](#), which [aims] to stop stomach cancer. I was honored with the Broadcaster of the Year award in 2016, and am emceeding their annual gala again this year. I also work with [Diabetes Research Institute Foundation](#) and [host] their annual fundraising event called Out of the Kitchen.

### **Do you feel responsible for setting an example for girls watching you on TV?**

I do. I love to talk to young girls about starting out and having them realize how hard it is. It's not just about being on television. You have to write, produce, and know what you're talking about. In this time of Instagram and selfies, being a journalist and keeping it real is the most important thing.

**Philanthropy philosophy:**

Giving and doing as much as you can for the charities and organizations that speak to you. I feel the best when I've contributed to something that's close to my heart.

## MELISSA MEDINA

Executive vice president of tech advancement platform eMerge Americas, president of The Medina Family Foundation, and mother of five, Melissa Medina is seamlessly breaking tech (and stereotypical) boundaries.



Madder print dress, [Marni](#) (\$1,580). *Miami Design District, 3930 NE Second Ave., 305-764-3357.*

Belt, Clara Pacheco (price on request). [minawild.com](#). Jewelry, *Medina's own*

**What challenges have you had to overcome?**

Being a woman, being Hispanic, being a mom, being the founder's [eMerge's Manny Medina] daughter. But I prefer to view them as drivers to prove to myself that I can push through. I was brought up by parents who encouraged me from a very young age to pursue whatever dream or passion I had. I never once thought that, because of these things, I couldn't pursue a career.

**What is one of the most important lessons you've learned from your father?**

I don't think I realized how truly blessed I am to have been raised by such an incredible man until later in life. Before that, he was just my dad. I realize now that I was raised by a mentor who taught me about sacrifice, determination, and perseverance.

## **Tell us about the Medina Family Foundation.**

Through the Medina Family Foundation, we directly help local nonprofits that impact our community through education and youth [programs]. I serve on the boards of several of these organizations, and I [like] to get my children involved, too!

## **How do you find balance?**

I think it is virtually impossible to have a perfectly balanced work-life schedule. I feel blessed to have such an incredible support system with an extremely supportive husband, mother, father, in-laws, and friends who all help me. If it weren't for them, there would be no way that I could work and be a mom of five children under 10 years old!

## **Philanthropy philosophy:**

It all goes back to the way my parents raised my brother and me; no matter how little or how much you have, it is important to give back whatever you can.

# **SHANNON ALLEN**

After her son was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, Shannon Allen struggled to find fast but healthy food options, so she took matters into her own hands. Enter Grown, an all-organic and allergy-friendly restaurant at the forefront of the health-conscious movement.



Adair jacket (\$375) and Earla skirt (\$350), [Alice + Olivia](#). *Miami Design District, 106 NE 40th St., 305-375-6056*. Shoes and jewelry, *Allen's own*

### **When was the moment you decided to create Grown?**

I'm a doer. I don't believe in the words "no" or "impossible." When my son Walker was diagnosed [with diabetes] and there were no healthy fast-food options when I needed them, I felt frustrated and defeated. I remember looking in the mirror and thinking, Shannon, nobody is going to come save you. I called my husband, [Miami Heat legend] Ray [Allen], and said, "If nobody's got big enough balls to reinvent fast food, I'm going to do it." That's the moment Grown (8211 S. Dixie Hwy., Miami, 305-663-4769) was born.

### **What does the future of Grown look like?**

We're growing! We have two locations at Hard Rock Stadium, and they are the only USDA organic-certified fast-food concepts in an NFL arena. We're opening in Orlando in Lake Nona inside of a Walmart. My dream is for every family, regardless of income or zip code, to be able to have access to organic fast food. With Grown living inside Walmart, a huge behemoth of a company that really cares, it truly makes us accessible to everyone.

### **How do you balance business, marriage, and motherhood?**

I find balance in my family. They are my source of joy, and spending time with them is how I recharge my batteries. Ray and I try to steal our moments. We've been together almost 21 years, and it's important to remember why we fell in love and to stay connected. And it's crucial for our five children to know that they are the most important thing in our lives.

### **Philanthropy philosophy:**

You can make an impact on someone's life by sharing your time. It's the small moments that really touch people.

## **PETRA LEVIN**

An avid art collector and former Miss Germany, Petra Levin has dedicated her life to the arts and bettering the community, as evidenced by her tireless efforts with the American Cancer Society, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, and many more.



Ruffled floral blouse, Rochas (\$411). [outnet.com](https://www.outnet.com). Herringbone wool midi-skirt, Tom Ford (\$697). [outnet.com](https://www.outnet.com). Shoes, *Levin's own*

### **How did you become an art collector?**

I always had a passion for contemporary art. I remember buying my first miniature Yves Klein sculpture many years ago. [But] becoming a collector doesn't happen overnight. I [keep up with the industry] by reading numerous art magazines, visiting galleries, and devote a lot of time traveling regularly with my husband [beverage tycoon Stephen Levin] to various art fairs in Berlin, New York, and London.

### **What is your opinion on women in the arts?**

Women have always been important to the art world as artists, curators, and directors, and have been historically underrated. To me, the most iconic [woman artist] is Louise Bourgeois. Her work has been so influential and boundary-breaking through her use of tools like radical abstraction and architectural interventions. She was one of the first artists in America to transcend gender [boundaries].

### **What has been one of your biggest challenges?**

Public speaking. Coming from Germany and learning English has taken a lot of time and effort. But being involved with charities and giving many speeches [helped me] develop confidence.

### **How do you recharge?**

Growing up, biking was part of our family activities. I still bike regularly on Miami Beach, and I devote time every day to exercise. But I also love playing

with my two puppies, Feena and Friday, who I secretly call my “happy pills.”  
Their cuteness and unconditional love always make me smile!

**What do you love the most about living in the Magic City?**

Miami has such an incredible variety of the arts. And taking our boat out on the bay with friends and watching the most beautiful sunsets in America is something really special.

**Philanthropy philosophy:**

I believe that people who have achieved a degree of financial success in life have a moral obligation to give back to charitable causes.

*Visit the American Cancer Society at [cancer.org](http://cancer.org) and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami at [icamiami.org](http://icamiami.org)*