

## Power Players: Miami's Most Philanthropic Women

by [Paige Mastrandrea](#)

October 17, 2017

### SHANNON ALLEN



Shannon and Ray Allen with their children

Photo Credit: Shannon Allen

### **When did your philanthropic work begin? •**

Even as a little girl, giving back was a big part of my life. My mom, who owned and operated the No. 1 independently owned real estate company in central Connecticut and worked 90 hours a week busting her a\*\* to build a brand, make a living and create a better life for us, dedicated whatever spare time she had to help people in need. She was a member of several charitable groups and helped unite people in our community. My sisters, dad and I would all help get involved. My mom has a heart of gold. Giving is in her DNA. I saw firsthand very early on the power of giving of yourself and how selflessness can affect someone's life for good.

### **What are some causes that you feel the closest connection to?**

My heart's cause is raising funds for a cure for Type 1 diabetes in honor of our son Walker, a 10-year-old champion that's been thriving in spite of diabetes since his diagnosis at 17 months old. My husband, Ray, has been donating computer centers to public middle schoolers in underserved communities for 21 years through his work with his Ray of Hope [ROH] Foundation, and it's been my honor to help champion his efforts. But our family's philanthropic work does not stop here. We are most drawn to causes for children and families, and to stand up and fight for people that have been marginalized. The truth is, I don't think we've ever turned down an opportunity to help anyone.

### **How have you worked to help these causes?**

Until very recently, I sat on the International Board of Directors for the JDRF and continue to lend my voice to raise awareness and funds for research for a cure for the JDRF, Joslin Diabetes Center of Boston and the Diabetes Research Institute here in Miami. Our family has been very fortunate to partner with our dear friends and fellow T1D parents, Andria and Javier Holtz [Marquis Bank, Holtz Children's Hospital], on several events here in Miami to raise the very necessary work that Dr. Camillo Ricordi and his team are working on to push the envelope towards a cure for our Walker, their son Andrew and the millions of adults and children like them that do battle with Type 1 every day.

### **What is your favorite philanthropic event in Miami?**

My favorite Miami events are the Ray Allen Golf Tournament to benefit the ROH Foundation and "Out of the Kitchen," which is held at the St. Regis in Bal Harbour, hosted by world-renowned Iron Chef, cookbook author and founder of Beyond Type 1, chef Sam Talbot and features 12 of Miami's hottest chefs. This event marries two of my passions—finding a cure for Type 1 and food! This year, we were honored to have a "Grown table" where our own Grown team delivered a scrumptious farm-to-table, five-course meal made with 100-percent USDA organic certified ingredients. I was so proud to have been able to lend our talents led by our executive chef, Jamarr Massey, to support our hearts cause.

### **Who are other women of substance that have had great influence over you?**

My list begins with the women that raised me. My grandmother, mom, aunts, my mother-in-law—these women have set the tone for influencing every part of my life and especially how I

parcel out my heart. This is really hard. There are so many women of substance that influence me on a daily basis. I am continually inspired by the innumerable contributions of my forever first lady, Michelle Obama, and her commitment to health and wellness for young people throughout the world. She set the tone for fitness, access to fresh fruits and veggies for all children regardless of socio-economic background and she fought to carve out a space of equality and worthiness for all young people. On a global level, Beyoncé is also at the top of my list—this phenomenal woman is not only a living legend with respect to her sheer artistry, but she is a living example of all the wonderful qualities of being a Grown woman. Wife, mother, daughter, sister, entrepreneur—giver. Her work with BeyGood is aspirational. Tiffany Ortiz is another person that stands out as a huge influencer in my philanthropic life. She personally has given her time as a member of UNICEF for over 14 years, has put her body and heart on the line every year to ride 250 miles for the Pan-Mass Challenge to raise money for cancer research, and the work she and her husband, David [“Big Papi” Ortiz] do through the David Ortiz Children’s Fund is literally lifesaving. They provide emergency heart surgeries for children in the Dominican Republic. This is my short list. I could keep going...

**What is your favorite memory you have from working on one of your philanthropic projects?**

Last year, Grown was very fortunate to have provided breakfast for several events for the Dolphins Cancer Challenge—a series of morning bike rides and runs based throughout Miami to raise funds for a cure for cancer. Our boys came to a morning ride and helped make omelettes and pass out yogurt parfaits, house-made baked goods and freshly squeezed orange juice to the famished riders/runners post-event. A woman came up to me at the event and introduced herself to me; she thanked me for being there, for donating food and for showing up to support the event. She went on to say that she had been living with Type 1 her whole life and was also a cancer survivor and that eating at Grown was a big part of her healing. She thanked me for creating it. Our son Walker overheard her and when she walked away he asked me, “Mom, do you think you would’ve created [Grown](#) if I had never gotten Type 1 Diabetes?” I told him no, and that if he hadn’t been diagnosed with a serious medical condition like Type 1, I never would’ve been so desperate or motivated to reinvent fast food. He looked at me and said, “If creating Grown helps people like that lady, and you wouldn’t have created it without me having Type 1, I’m okay with it. I’m okay with the diabetes, Mom.” My beautiful baby summed it all up for me. He was willing to sacrifice his own health and battle every day for the rest of his life until there’s a cure if it meant helping others. The ultimate gift. The gift of yourself. This is what I think about when people ask me to help, to donate time or money or to spread the word. My children are the reason I give.

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