

## Getting to know Sonja Nichols

By Jennie Buckner

Sonja Nichols wears many hats – and does it with a joyful style that’s all her own. She’s an energetic community and philanthropic leader; passionate public speaker; faithful Sunday school teacher; writer on spiritual topics; devoted wife and mother of three. As co-chair of the upcoming Women’s Collective Giving Network convention, she has spent the summer planning for that big event while also putting the finishing touches on three books and getting her “baby girl” ready to head off to college.



*Q. How do you manage to do all of that? Where do you get your energy?* I’m an extremely spiritual person and that focuses me. I believe that the one thing I am supposed to do while on this earth is to share God’s joy. We have so many reasons to be grateful and happy, and I want to demonstrate that.

*Q. Can you tell us more?* That feeling must have started early with me. My grandmother has told me that whenever she dropped me off at kindergarten or the playground, I would immediately run up to hug the other children. And to this day, I am a hugger. I’m genuinely happy to meet people, and I want to express that happiness.

*Q. Where did you grow up and how did it shape you?* I was raised in two places: San Francisco by my grandparents who ran a nightclub, and Tallahassee, FL, by an aunt and uncle who was an Episcopal priest. It was an interesting mix! But both environments taught me the importance of hospitality and being welcoming. As we know, it’s the different facets that give a diamond its sparkle.

*Q. As co-chair of the WCGN convention, what do you want our members to know?* That WIF is highly esteemed. We are known as one of the top three giving groups in the country, so our visitors will be eager to meet us. I hope lots of WIF members will attend the conference and volunteer. I hope they will tell our story and share their enthusiasm. When our visitors head home, I hope they leave saying, “Wow!”

*Q. You’ve done a lot for WIF, including serving as Board Chair. What aspect of WIF membership has been most meaningful to you?* I’ve had so many meaningful experiences. The first one came shortly after I joined our board and got to know Kathy IZARD. Kathy was leading Urban Ministry Center’s Homeless to Homes program, preparing to move about a dozen homeless people off the streets and into their very own apartments. She was looking for a donor to provide the linens, dishes, and everything needed to set up housekeeping. I realized some friends and I might be able to help. We were just forming a new chapter of Jack and Jill, an organization for African-American women and their kids, and we were looking for a service

project. This one really resonated! We filled a big storage unit with everything that was needed. I got to experience the “ripple effect” that we talk about in WIF, where members learn about community needs and fulfill them. And Kathy and I became even better friends.

*Q. What made you decide to write your book “Your Amazing Body, Your Amazing Organization?”* This actually was intended to be a speech for a WCGN event. But God intervened. My WCGN luncheon keynote turned into a book I could share with a broader audience. I wanted women to know that each of us is specially made to be just the way we are. And so are the organizations we belong to. The book talks about how we need to embrace our uniqueness!



*Q. What’s the best advice you ever received?* I’ve gotten lots of great advice from many people, but my best advisor is Richard Nichols. He is one of the wisest people I know – which is why I asked him to marry me! We met in college when I was 17, and he became my best friend. We’ve been married 28 years.

*Q. What would people be surprised to learn about you?* Most people are shocked that I ride a Harley Davidson motorcycle. I bought my husband his first Harley, but he didn’t have a riding buddy. So I literally took a motorcycle class at CPCC and he bought me a bike. We used to explore the back roads of North Carolina, but we haven’t done much of that recently. We have been focused on doing things with the kids.

*Q: If you could have one super power, what would it be?* I would want to read people’s minds. I’d love to know exactly what you are thinking!

*Q. What is one guilty pleasure you enjoy too much to give up?* Bacon. A close second is coconut pineapple cake made by Queen City bakery. I love to cook “old school,” which means I use lots of butter and heavy cream. And bacon.

*Q. Is there anything else you’d like to share with WIF members?* I’d love for them to embrace how truly great they are -- as individuals and as a group. I have met some of the best women anywhere through this organization. I don’t think I would have been asked to do some of the things I’ve been asked to do, if not for them. WIF is a fantastic platform to stand on.