

ONE-ON-ONE WITH LAUREN SHELTON U-T PROFILES ...

BY DEBORAH SULLIVAN BRENNAN; Photo Eduardo Contreras | midnight March 19, 2016 | Updated, 8:06 a.m.



Lauren Shelton, who runs the Visual and Performing Arts programs in Chula Vista, poses for photos at the UT on Thursday in San Diego, California. — *Eduardo Contreras / San Diego Union-Tribune*

Lauren Shelton counts music among her earliest and fondest memories, starting with her father's impromptu serenades when she was a little girl. She joined the San Diego Children's Choir at 8 years old and continued until she graduated from Torrey Pines High School, touring with the organization nationally and internationally.

After discovering that she loved teaching music as much as playing it, she became a classroom educator, music director of multiple choirs and ran the

Community Opus Project with the San Diego Youth Symphony, which provides free after-school music instruction.

Shelton, 34, of Marina Village, wished every student could have the rich arts education that she enjoyed. So when the Chula Vista Elementary School District allocated \$15 million over three years to restore arts education that had dwindled in recent years, Shelton gladly took the role of coordinator for the district's visual and performing arts program.

The program offers visual arts and music instructions in all Chula Vista schools, giving students a chance at the cultural education that she treasured in her own childhood.

Q: How did you become interested in music?

A: My father is a musician and composer. He would have me sit on his lap while he was playing piano and sing to me since I was 8 months old. I was given my first record player for my second birthday and played the soundtrack from "Annie" on repeat and would perform for anyone who walked into our house.

Q: What do you love about singing?

A: Singing feeds my soul - whether I am in the car, on stage, singing karaoke or with a choir. There is a sense of euphoria that occurs when I perform a very intricate choral piece and a rush when the applause sounds after the final note.

Q: How did you pursue a career in music education?

A: My mother was an administrator for San Diego Unified for over 30 years. She was very supportive of my love for singing and my career. She also saw my love for teaching when I was an instructional aid on her campuses. In my last year of college at the University of California Riverside, she encouraged me to

take the tests to go into teaching. Before I graduated, I was offered a job at King Chavez Academy of Excellence to become a teacher, as well as begin the after-school music program and lead the school choir. After my first year, I knew that I was meant to provide students with a robust arts education.

Q: Please tell us about the Chula Vista arts program.

A: Chula Vista Elementary School District is emerging from years of very limited arts programs. The San Diego Youth Symphony partnered with the district in 2010 to start an after-school program in an effort to advocate for music in the schools. Through the work of the Community Opus Project, the district began to bring more music opportunities to students across the district. This past June, the district approved \$5 million a year for the next three years to pay for visual and performing arts teacher salaries in support of teacher collaboration. Last year, we had six full-time music teachers across the district. This year, the district has hired over 65 full-time arts teachers.

Q: Why is it important for kids to study the arts in school?

A: The arts are a pathway to greater understanding of self, community and the world. The arts teach children resiliency, determination, pride and focus. When students participate in the arts, studies have shown that attendance and test scores increase, but it also develops the social and emotional side of the child.

Q: What are some of your favorite arts projects offered in the program?

A: I really enjoyed attending all the winter performances that showcased visual and performing arts. One that stands out was the kindergarten class at Liberty Elementary. It was incredible to see all of the kindergartners playing instruments, singing and dancing all at the same time.

Q: How can parents, students and teachers help bring arts education to other schools?

A: The California Alliance for Arts Education is working through their Arts Now California campaign to communicate the value of making the arts a core part of every child's education. I encourage them to connect to artsed411.org to learn how to be advocates.

Q: What's the best advice you ever received?

A: My husband is a retired chief from the U.S. Navy. He has provided guidance and support as I have gone through the adventure of arts management. He has helped shape me as a leader and given me confidence in my position.

Q: What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?

A: When I was in college, I worked for Jerry Lewis as a nanny for his 8-year-old daughter when he and his family would visit their boat in the San Diego harbor. His daughter and I completely connected and I ended up spending 10 years with the family. When I became a teacher, I brought Danielle with me to work and had her volunteer. I absolutely loved my time with the Lewis family, learning from Jerry, and hearing all of his amazing stories of his time in show business.

Q: Please describe your ideal San Diego weekend.

A: Our ideal weekend begins with happy hour with our neighbors at the The Lion's Share. Our multigenerational group enjoys our evenings spent with co-owner Carlos and the delicious food. When the weather is perfectly sunny, you will find me hiking at Torrey Pines or walking around the Hillcrest Farmers Market. My husband and I can always be found attending one of San Diego's many cultural events or outdoor concerts, or simply sharing a glass of wine on our patio watching the sunset.