

The Spotlight this month is on Christine Gillen.

Christine (pictured with her dog, Trouble) is a native Ohioan, born in Akron, but moved, with her parents, as a child to Barberton, Ohio, where she attended school, met and married her high school sweetheart. They had one son, Jake, who is 22. They were divorced in 1998 and she subsequently met and married her present husband, Jon, in 1999. Christine and Jon lived in Long Beach, N.Y. for nine years before moving to Florida four years ago and live in Lakeside in Heathrow.

She has a B.A. in Philosophy and Pre-Law from Molloy and a Masters degree in Accounting and Finance. Christine was a banker for almost 20 years, although she took some time off when her son was in junior high and high school. She started in banking as a teller in a small community bank and worked her way up through the ranks. All the while she was working full time she also was going to school at night. At the end of her banking career she was senior vice president in charge of branch operations, risk management and mortgage lending. While Christine and Jon lived in New York she was head of consumer lending at a local bank.

After a few years Christine decided to leave the bank and concentrate on finishing her education, which she did, and also became interested in going to law school. At that point, fate stepped in with a diagnosis of an auto-immune disease, for which stress is an enemy, so the law school idea had to be discarded. She had already been accepted to a law school on Long Island, but after losing a kidney and spending a month in and out of the hospital she began to take life easier. Christine diagnoses herself as a type A personality and knows how unusual people who know her now find that idea. She learned some valuable life lessons when this disease appeared. The things she once thought important she now realizes are not. The important things in life are not one's career and all the accomplishments. She has learned to slow down and not take life so seriously.

Christine sold real estate for a short time, but then Jon was transferred to Florida, their house in New York sold in three weeks, they found their house in Heathrow very quickly and things just fell into place. She was in the process of sitting for her CPA license when she was offered the opportunity to open her own travel agency, Lake Mary Cruise Planners – cruise and land specialist. She and Jon love to travel so she thought, “why not?” and the rest is history. They have traveled over much of the world, swimming with sharks in Bora Bora and other adventures. She says she tells people she is the best educated travel agent they'll ever meet.

Becoming a member of HWC is one of the best things Christine has done since moving here. She says she gets much more out of being a member of Women's Club than she could ever put into it. Christine has put herself in the middle of the activities, learning as she goes and is passing on that knowledge to others in turn. (Christine currently serves as Co-Chair of the HWC Ways & Means Committee.)

Bink Myton