

COVER STORY Champion for Health

Meet Deb Sears

Text by Becky Kolosik • Photos by Photojeania

In a few short weeks, we will be celebrating one of the summer's most anticipated events – the 2012 Olympics. Athletes from all over the world will converge on London to put their skill and athleticism to the test with the ultimate goal of standing on the podium with a gold, silver or bronze medal. With the Olympics acting as a showcase for human excellence, this year in particular has the added motivation to drive us all to reach new heights in strong and healthy living. We can all draw on the dedication and motivation of each of these “champions” to inspire us.

But what exactly is a champion? Dot Richardson said, “A true champion is someone who wants to make a difference, who never gives up, and who gives everything she has no matter what the circumstances are. A true champion works hard and never loses sight of her dreams.”

Deb Sears is no doubt a champion in her own right...she is a woman who has never lost sight of her goals and dreams, and she thrives on making a difference by working hard to advocate for health and wellness – both physically and financially for all her clients at Sears Insurance.

When I Grow Up...I Want to Be An Insurance Agent?!

Ask any kid what they want to be when they grow up, and you'll likely not hear them say an insurance agent. Looking back at how her career took shape, Deb admits that it was almost like she knew exactly what she wanted to do. As a teenager, she started volunteering at the Masonic Home assisting seniors and was very hands on with grandparents. When her grandfather passed away, she took an interest and involvement in his insurance paperwork. “He was old school with how he handled his health and finances,” Deb says. “It really put me in a frame of mind to think about aging and health issues...and what it was really all about.”



Deb enjoys a quick photo opportunity with fellow WOW business women.

Her senior year of high school, Deb scored an internship at Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield. “Even then, I had a lot of involvement in the various areas of insurance, but didn't really fully understand what all of it meant at the time,” she says. After graduation she was Secretary to the Chairman of the Board, President and Vice President of Iowa's largest savings and loan - American Federal.

A New Love...and a New Opportunity

In 1978, Deb was fortunate to meet the love her life, Dan Sears. Little did she know that this new relationship would open the door to a life-long insurance career. Dan had a successful insurance agency and that same year, Deb became the first female career agent and was outnumbered nearly 50 to 1 by men. “They were very welcoming to me,” she says. “They encouraged me, trained me and I felt privileged to be associated with such a great group of respectful gentlemen.”

Being a woman didn't seem to hinder her client relationships either. “I worked very well with our clients – most of who were over age 65 seeking long-term care insurance,” Deb explains. “I felt like I was talking with my grandparents again, plus, I had the privilege to meet and insure a good share of my clients' children, leading me to three and sometimes four generation families.” Deb admits that the first few years were challenging simply for the fact that insurance is 100% commission and it takes three to five years to be completely self-supporting. Through persistence and goal setting, Deb's career continued to climb in those initial years... and so did her relationship with Dan. They were married on August 19, 1982 – on top of Pikes Peak – by military Chaplain George Fort from The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Today, Deb is president of Sears Insurance and the agency is celebrating 40 years. When Dan decided to retire, she had 20 years in the business and was fully prepared to become his successor. He still serves as her mentor in this business that started out with long-term care as its flagship product. Over the years, the agency has expanded to include a full line of health and life products for businesses and individuals.

A Champion in Work & Life

Deb sees the advantages on a personal and corporate level for healthy habits to be incorporated into daily life. From an insurance perspective, the agency promotes wellness programs through all their carriers and stresses the importance of keeping individuals, employers and employees healthy and productive. In her personal life, Deb strives to live by the same philosophy. “I enjoy walking around Gray's Lake to keep fit, and both Dan and I love to cook and prepare healthy meals.”

Owning her own business has afforded her the opportunity to keep a balance in her life – which also promotes health and happiness. While she is committed to consistent service to her clients and the many referrals they send her way (she has been a Top Agent for many years), family will always come first. She had the flexibility to be a hands-on mom to now grown daughter,



At left, daughter Kendi Sears Marshall, pictured with her husband, John has followed in her parents footsteps with a career in insurance.



Kendi, as well as enjoy all the benefits of a large, blended family. “Our home is busting at the seams when we have all the family together,” she exclaims. “Holiday and birthday gatherings are extra special whether in our home in Des Moines or at our lake home on Sun Valley.”

A Champion for Women in Business

Today, you can find Deb hard at work in her home office – which includes its own garage, kitchen, three large, separate office spaces and a library. “My office is completely separate, yet part of our home,” she explains. “I can shut the door behind me and go home, but still be footsteps away if needed.” And of course, technology keeps her connected, too. She is excited about the opportunities that have opened up for women in her field. While men still tip the scales in the industry, as they retire, more females are stepping in as younger career agents. Her daughter, Kendi has even found her niche in the insurance business, too. A graduate with honors from both Dowling Catholic High School and Creighton University, Kendi is a Marketing Manager for Mutual of Omaha. She is happily married to her high school sweetheart, John, who was also an honor student from both Dowling Catholic High School and Creighton University and now a successful CPA.

Deb is very much involved in women’s networking and relationship building through her involvement with BNI, American Business Women’s Association and WOW. She enjoys all of the trials, tribulations and laughter that she and her boomer counterparts have in common, but also finds it important to encourage younger women to strive for balance between work and home/family life. “I hope that I can be an example that anything is possible if you work hard, set goals and never give up on your dreams.” *



Deb’s parents recently celebrated their 57th wedding anniversary.

Meet Deb’s “Champions” in Life

Family values have shaped who Deb is today. “I was raised by the greatest generation,” she says of her “Ozzie & Harriett-like” upbringing where her mom stayed home and knew where the kids were every minute of the day. “We had our meals at the dinner table, curfews, and a strong discipline that was administered in the form of love – negotiations were not an option. Expectations and accountability were high and that helped me be a successful spouse, parent and business owner.”



Deb’s 96 year-old grandmother has taught her the importance of being happy inside.

Deb’s grandmother enjoys a very active and independent life. She never misses a family get-together and lives by the motto “Do not tell lies and do not carry weight...just be happy inside.” As an insurance agent, Deb knows that weight is the common denominator in so many health issues and diseases. “Grandma says that to be healthy and happy, your mind, body and spirit must be in sync.”

When Dan and Deb met, there was a generation age gap.

“Raising our daughter together kept Dan young and played a pivotal role in him overcoming some serious health obstacles,” Deb says. A misdiagnosis in 2008 led them to seek out MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, TX (a Center of Excellence for Cancer). “After a lifesaving surgery, we returned for Kendi’s wedding at St. John’s Church on Creighton Campus in Omaha, and the following day we headed back to Houston for six weeks of intense chemotherapy and radiation therapy.” Deb was still able to work her business away from home, making the Top 1% with Wellmark and meeting exceptional goals with other carriers. They’ve worked side by side, laughed and traveled the world together in their 30 years of marriage. “We share a deep faith and strong will that nothing is impossible.”



Dan has been Deb’s partner in life and business.