

Bringing Out the Best

By Doreen Overstreet

For East Orlando resident Kimberly Sterling, the importance of mentoring can't be overstated.

As a young woman in the early 1970s, long-time **East Orlando** resident **Kimberly Sterling** found herself in a tough spot. A 19-year-old single mother living in a mobile home, working as a waitress and receiving welfare checks, she was struggling. Although she earned good grades in high school, her situation made it impossible for her to attend college.

"I knew I was capable of achieving more in life for both me and my child, but I wasn't sure how to create a path to success with a fulfilling career," she says.

Sterling found the motivation she needed in a mentor—and she isn't the exception. According to CareerWomen.com, the majority of working women (62 percent) have a formal or informal mentor—someone who has influenced and contributed to their career success.

Eventually, Sterling stopped waitressing and got a job at an Orlando law firm as a legal secretary. **Fred Ward**, a senior partner in the firm, saw her potential and urged her to go to night school. It took seven years, but she worked her way through Valencia Community College and then Rollins College, earning a degree in accounting.

Juggling school, full-time work and motherhood wasn't easy, but Fred constantly encouraged Sterling to complete her studies and taught her how to be a professional. After she earned her degree, Ward enthusiastically recommended Sterling to his friend, **Arnold Howell**, a senior partner in

a local accounting firm.

"Due largely to Fred's strong recommendation, Arnold hired me as an intern—and he became my next mentor and role model," Sterling says. "One year later, I earned my CPA, and he encouraged me to get involved in various leadership programs that helped me hone my skills as a speaker, manager and facilitator."

Howell's guidance and encouragement enabled Sterling to found her own CPA firm. After that, Sterling continued to stay in touch with Howell and build her credentials to serve as president of Resource Consulting Group, a fee-only financial planning and investment advisory firm.

Always one to pay it forward, Sterling has served as a mentor for the past nine years to downtown Orlando resident **Nicole Rutledge**, a senior financial advisor at Resource Consulting Group.

"I started out as a receptionist and then Kimberly's assistant," Rutledge says. "When I expressed interest in pursuing a career in finance, she encouraged me to take the next steps and took me under her wing. She taught me everything I know by sharing knowledge and advice."

"Mentorship is something anyone can offer and also benefit from," Sterling says. "It's the type of encouragement that helps change lives." **L**

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Kimberly Sterling (left) with her mentee Nicole Rutledge.

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