



alumni success stories

coro pittsburgh power couple...

LYNNE & JOE VENTRESS

FELLOWS PROGRAM IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, 2006
PUBLIC ALLIES, 2007



Lynne and Joe Ventress are a Coro Pittsburgh power couple. Their connections to their respective programs have taught them both a lot about civic leadership, but it's also contributed to their personal lives... especially their marriage.

"I do think one thing that Coro and Public Allies taught us both was to really listen to other people, to really try to hear them, and to understand what they are saying about what is important to them." says Lynne, "And that has saved us so much marital stress! No one ever talks about that, but it was really great. It saved us like 5 years of marriage counseling."

As a couple, Coro has been transformational in their lives. After Lynne finished her year as a Coro Pittsburgh Fellow in Public Affairs in 2006, Joe moved to Pittsburgh to marry Lynne, and he entered the Public Allies program in its inaugural year.

"Public Allies made me aware I have a footprint. After Public Allies I realized I was becoming a community leader," says Joe, "and my actions had an effect on those around me. It gave me ability to assess my own strengths and the strengths of others and to engage in making a difference for people."

Lynne was teaching seventh grade in a school in Louisiana with Teach for America when she met Joe. What she saw was that the systems in place to help and support kids through their education were not enough. She applied for the Coro Fellows Program in Public Affairs to help her understand how these systems work and to learn how to make a real impact.

"I was privileged growing up, I never really wanted for anything," says Lynne. "After I took classes in civil rights and in urban geography, I began to understand how much inequity there still is in our country. I knew then that I would work to try and solve these inequities and make a real difference in people's lives."

Joe had his own moment of realization when he came to Pittsburgh with Lynne and entered the Public Allies program. "As a coach and an athlete in Louisiana, I usually just thought I was doing what made me happy," says Joe. "I never truly appreciated how coaching was changing the lives of people around me."

After Public Allies, Joe became an entrepreneur and started his own business offering low cost personal training to low-income residents. His idea aimed to bring affordable exercise programs to people who most needed to regain their fitness and/or who suffer chronic diseases like diabetes and obesity.

"I never would have started my business without Public Allies," says Joe. "I used a lot of training I learned to start this new social venture and realized the impact I could make doing exactly what I loved to do."

"Both programs give you a focused sense of self," says Lynne. "You become aware of where you want to be and what you want to do."

Both Lynne and Joe plan to continue to use their Coro experiences as they begin the next phase of their lives and their marriage. In August 2011, they moved to Washington, D.C. where Lynne will finish her graduate degree from CMU's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management and Joe will enter a D.P.T program in Physical Therapy at Marymount University.

"What I will truly take with me from my time in Pittsburgh is that there are so many amazing people who have such focus and such vision," says Lynne. "You look around the city and there are so many great civic leaders who are really having an impact in our communities."

Lynne and Joe have some parting advice for the incoming classes of Public Allies and The Fellows Program in Public Affairs.

"Be ready to be uncomfortable... You are not nearly as good as you think you are, but when you leave you will be better, so stick with it. You have more bad habits than you realize, but by admitting that, you can address them. Oh, and finally, Coro is the only place you will get real feedback in life, the rest of your life you get fired, so the feedback part is pretty unique and pretty powerful," says Joe.

"Well Joe usually puts it better than me," says Lynne, "so I'm just going to do an Amen."