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# Laguna!

LIFE & PEOPLE

## Angie Miller: with can-do spirit, she's a giver, a doer, and she likes having some fun in between

By MAGGI HENRIKSON

Photos by Mary Hurlbut

I'm trying to keep up with Angie Miller, but her thoughts and words are as busy as her life in general. She's got her corporate advertising, design and promotions company, Miller & Associates, firing on all cylinders and an event company she's partnered on (Fun is First), for which she is, no doubt, the life of the party. She's an artist. She's big on pinnipeds (serving on the board at the Pacific Marine Mammal Center), humans (on the board of the Laguna Beach Community Foundation), and flora; she's a certified Master Gardener.

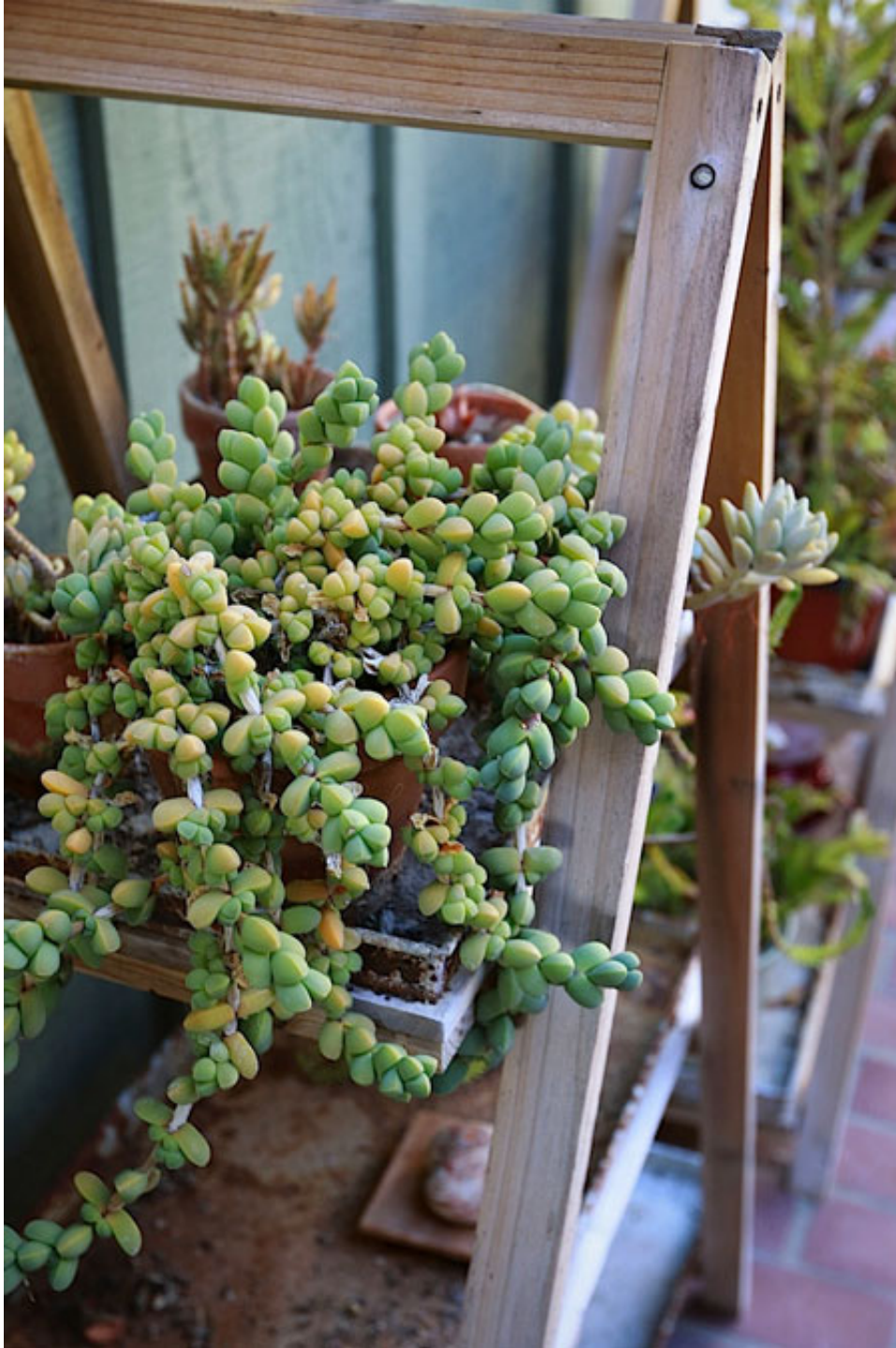
Oh, and then she's hopping aboard Semester at Sea's ship with her friend, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. She calls him Little Arch!



**Angie Miller**

I can't stop writing as we talk, and I can't stop laughing at her off-the-cuff tales.

There was the time she thought, wouldn't it be interesting to get other people's take on me? So, she sent out postcards to friends, teachers, family, and people who have influenced her, asking, "What is an Angie Miller?" The responses came back in all forms. "The collection is the funniest little thing," said Angie. "There were words, poems, photos – and even scratch and sniff!"



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***Angie has had 12 years of classes and been certified as a Master Gardener***

Or the time her friend and business partner at Fun is First threw her a parade for her birthday. Karen, who Angie calls The Queen of Fun, got the high school marching band to bring their oohm-pa-pa on down to Forest Avenue, and Angie, who at the time was *not* in the mood, was forced to get out front with a baton. You can't help but change your mood when that happens!

"I couldn't have started a business with someone more fun," Angie says about Karen. "I was so uptight – I'm selling heart valve parameter charts!" Fun is First is the perfect foil to Miller & Associate's straight-man.

One of her long-time clients is Edwards Life Science, for whom Miller & Associates does marketing display type products. "It's like bi-polar with the two businesses," she laughs. "It's stents, and vascular stuff – or party."

***Heading West - and around the world***

Back in the day when Angie Miller was trying to shed her Georgia accent as a college freshman in California, she would drive

her roommates slightly nuts. She was an art major who freely admits, "I would do anything!" One day she'd move the dryer into the living room so she could work on silk screening 2,000 shirts. Another day she'd be on a Master Framing project, and fill the place with frames of every size.

Ever hardworking and motivated, Angie attended Chapman University on a full scholarship. After graduating with a Fine Arts degree, she expanded her silk-screening into graphic design and into a full-on marketing business. Her first real workspace was at the Newport Shipyard, and her clients quickly grew: "start-ups" such as Platinum Software, and Three-Day Blinds. When the business moved to Laguna Beach they were the biggest shipper at the local FedEx.

She attributes her entrepreneurial drive to her junior year, when she went out on Semester at Sea, a shipboard program for global study abroad. It was a work/study situation, and Angie worked as the ship's photography assistant. The program taught her about the world, and more importantly the world of ideas, which she loves. "That's when you realize the world is flat," she says.

Semester at Sea studies include mentors and world leaders on occasion, such as the civil rights activist Julian Bond, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Angie is a founding board member of Semester at Sea's Alumni Board of Directors and still joins the group at sea a couple of times a year to serve as a mentor to the students.

#### A commitment to care

A couple of things have caused life-changing moments for Angie. Professionally, she has worked hard to keep the business moving forward; from personally fighting for small business laws in Sacramento, to recovering from the heartbreaking loss of many clients in New York on 9/11.

Personally, she made a decision to help someone who had become close to her: the Laguna FedEx driver, Susan. Angie and I talked on the exact anniversary of Susan's death 11 years ago.

"When she got cancer I committed as a friend to help her. I took time off work to care for her. We had a team; it was a hell of a journey," she said. "It made me realize I need to be not so serious about work.

"There was quite an impact. I lost a chunk of business when I took care of her – so now I do what I like."



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The business she has, she likes. And her time to "give back" has grown exponentially. Those are the things that matter to Angie Miller.

"You know people for all different types of reasons," she says philosophically. "That's what I love about it."

#### First things first

Perhaps she met her Fun is First partner to balance all the "whacky-doo" stuff she does with brochures and serious medical subject material. "We were not thinking it would be a big thing," said Angie. "Fun is First was meant to do little pretty parties!"

Then they got a big ole party in San Diego, and then they got another biggie right in their own backyard – the opening of the Montage. They put on a doozy.

"That was the best thing that ever happened," Angie said. "It's amazing that we sell fun. And we like it when fun comes back!"

Montage's party lit up with fireworks, literally. The only other time there were private fireworks in Laguna that I know of? At Angie Miller's 40th birthday. Not that it could ever happen again, but be on the lookout for something coming up – Angie's birthday is November 19.

Like the song says, the future's so bright I'm wearing shades!

Angie's worked out a good balance in her life of hard work, good fun, and giving her best to many of Laguna's charities. And

she does it all with thoughtfulness, humility, and joy. Her head may be dreaming up some new schemes, but her feet are firmly planted on the ground.

Going forward, Angie is making plans...

"Good friends, good health, throw some travel in there – and make it flat!"