



(L TO R) DONA AYERS, ANGELA CARR-PATTERSON, KELLY SEABROOK, JESSICA MARTINEZ, WENDY BRAWLEY

IMARA Woman's 15-Year Staying Power

Positive platforms educate, inspire,
and empower SC communities

By Perdita Spriggs

IMARA Woman magazine co-founders Paul and Wendy Brawley channel their dreams into community action. Mixing heartfelt determination and social commitment, Paul and Wendy have firmly rooted IMARA Woman Magazine deep in South Carolina soil, first as a positive storyteller and now as a go-to platform that educates, inspires, and empowers. They believe uplifting news has given IMARA Woman 15-year staying power during calm and tempest times.

“Paul and I were watching the news and realized we didn’t see very many good stories,” remembers Wendy, publisher and chief executive officer. “Somebody needed to start a magazine showcasing local successes, highlighting people of color. I asked Paul, ‘Why can’t we do it?’”

“To the average person, it probably didn’t make sense,” says Paul, president and chief financial officer. “We didn’t have a journalism background, but Wendy and I knew the business world and were intrigued with the idea of spreading good news. We were willing to take a leap of faith.”

IMARA Woman Makes History

On average, a staggering 60 percent of magazines fail in their first year and 90 percent fold by their tenth year. Those dire stats, coupled with the 2008 recession, forced many well-intentioned magazines out-of-print. But Paul and Wendy rejected the odds, creating a lifestyle and personal growth publication that speaks to all South Carolinians.

The Brawley’s goals for IMARA Woman are simple yet powerful. “We envision a high quality, attractive publication

that improves the quality of people’s lives,” says Wendy. “Our focus was, and still is, the amazing accomplishments of South Carolinians, particularly African-American women.”

Paul and Wendy quickly transformed their vision into reality. The magazine’s initial advisory board meeting, held Friday, October 13, 2000, generated enough ideas and energy to fill several editions. Wendy readily admits, “We couldn’t do it without the help of others. I’m so grateful for all of our support.” Four months later, the Brawleys proudly introduced IMARA Woman magazine to the Palmetto State.

IMARA Woman Magazine’s unveiling made South Carolina history. More than 600 guests gathered at the South Carolina State Museum on President’s Day weekend in 2001. “We were blessed to launch a historic publication,

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—Wendy Brawley,
Publisher and CEO,
IMARA Woman magazine

in a historic place, in the middle of Black History Month,” shares Wendy. “What more could Paul and I ask for?”

Paul and Wendy work alongside their two children, a team of writers, editors, advisory board members, community partners, printer, and a photographer of 15 years. “We want to always produce a credible publication that attracts readers and sponsors who are proud of what IMARA represents,” Paul emphasizes. “It’s important our entire magazine, including advertisers, express positive images that move our community forward.”

Positive Platforms Empower Communities

Now 25,000 readers strong, IMARA Woman Magazine bridges a gap for communities hungry for a one-of-a-kind, feel good publication celebrating and targeting South Carolina’s melting pot population. IMARA Communications Group, Inc., currently operates from the heart of downtown Columbia in Brawley-owned space, home to the quarterly magazine and hub central for IMARA’s complementary suite of events.

“We feel events, such as the Empowerment Tour, are so important,” says Wendy. “We want to do more than just tell people how to better their lives. We want to help them achieve their goals.”

The IMARA Community Foundation, the philanthropic

501(c)(3) non-profit arm, partners with loyal sponsors to offer several community-based events. IMARA is proudly supported by organizations committed to uplifting minority communities: Select Health of South Carolina, AARP, Palmetto Health, AmeriHealth Caritas Partnership, South Carolina Housing, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of South Carolina, the Richland One Community Coalition, South Carolina Primary Health Care Association, and AT&T.

“Our community partners trust us to stay true to our mission,” acknowledges Paul, who is also the Auditor for Richland County. “Together, we provide information and programs beneficial to our underserved populations.”

“We are so grateful for corporate and community support,” says Foundation Board Chair Lathran Woodard.



“IMARA has held steadfast, proving even a small group can impact women’s health.” The foundation also collects and donates personal items through IMARA’s Closet, supporting the Naomi Project, a shelter for battered women and their children in Florence.

IMARA Woman inspires women, and men, to take control of their lives. Hundreds attend the annual, free Health Ministry Empowerment Tour in rural communities, designed to encourage holistic health through mind, body, and spirit messages. “We have served more than 8,000 women and men during the tour since 2002,” notes Wendy. “Our presence lets women in the smallest communities know they matter to us and small lifestyle changes can reap huge health rewards.”

Select Health’s Lillian Suarez, director for community

outreach and education, values her company's longstanding IMARA partnership. "We are very committed to helping people get care, stay well, and build healthy communities," she says. "Wendy Brawley's passion to empower and increase the quality of life for our communities is a perfect fit for our mission."

IMARA Woman's black-tie Anniversary and Scholarship Gala "celebrates the magazine's staying power each year with our friends, family, and supporters," beams Wendy. "We want to show our love and appreciation for those who have helped us along the way." IMARA, with sponsor support, has awarded more than \$65,000 in scholarships to South Carolina historically black college and university students.

The annual Circle of Influence Leadership Summit brings seasoned and aspiring women leaders together to collaboratively develop strategies to combat poverty, crime, and health disparities in underserved communities.



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Select Health of SC



PAUL BRAWLEY JR., MARKETING MANAGER,
PRODUCER, IMARA WOMAN TV

"Leaders from all life stages learn from and support each other," says Wendy.

Delving into television was another leap of faith for Paul and Wendy. IMARA TV covers "the issues you care about with more than just talk" in 38 of 46 South Carolina counties, touching homes along the Georgia and North Carolina borders. Five beautifully hued co-hosts tackle national and statewide topics every 4th Sunday on WLTX and the CW, with the potential to reach 1.8 million viewers.

Wendy joins co-hosts Kelly A. Seabrook, Jessica Martinez, Angela Carr Patterson, and Dona Ayers to

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—Paul Brawley,
Chief Financial Officer,
IMARA Woman magazine



provide varied perspectives on trending topics. The women agree, “IMARA is at the forefront of issues affecting the community, and we want to give them enough information to make informed decisions,” says Dona Ayers. They hope to “inspire women of all ages and backgrounds. Healthy, empowered women are the backbone of the family and the community,” says Angela Carr-Patterson.

It's a Family Affair

IMARA Woman is truly a Brawley family affair. Paul and Wendy's adult son and daughter, Paul Jr. and Kanita Rose, have worked with the magazine since day one. “I started out delivering magazines to local churches with my dad,” remembers Paul Jr., IMARA Woman marketing manager and talk show producer. “Now, I look for new ways to expand our readers and viewers.”

Kanita lends a hand during the empowerment tours, working around her college graduate studies. “IMARA Woman gives everyone a voice,” she says. “Our parents created an awesome idea that reaches people at so many levels.”

What's next for Team Brawley and IMARA Woman? “A lot has changed since we first launched the magazine. We want to stay fresh and relevant,” considers Wendy. “We are expanding our annual IMARA Man tribute, enjoying our new website, and dipping our toes in the digital waters by publishing an e-mag and building a social media presence. So much more is out there, we'll just have to wait and see.” ■



Dona Ayers

A University of South Carolina graduate and a conservative political consultant.

Angela Carr-Patterson

The CEO of Oasis Promotions, LLC, a Leadership and Professional Development Company.

Wendy C. Brawley

A University of South Carolina graduate with a Master's Degree in Business Management from Webster University. She is the CEO of IMARA Communications Group, Inc.

Jessica Martinez

A University of Phoenix graduate who owns a part-time financial services business with plans to pursue a Master's degree from the University of South Carolina.

Kelly A. Seabrook

A graduate of San Jose State University and a graduate of the University of South Carolina School of Law. She opened her own practice in 2009 in Columbia, the Law Office of Kelly A. Seabrook, LLC.