

Get to Know Your NWACA Board Member – Dana Winer

This month we are featuring an interview with Dana Winer, the chair of our Civic Engagement Committee. The interview was conducted and documented by another recent addition to the Board, Kevin Kott, co-chair of our Crime and Safety Committee. Below, we find the interviewer and interviewee meeting at Azul Tequila, a fine Mexican restaurant in NWACA.

KEVIN: (aside – we caused a bit of confusion in our waiter due to Dana’s vegetarian and allergy avoidance diet and my “no mammals” diet. But all is well.) So, Dana, why are you vegetarian?

DANA: When people ask me why I'm a vegetarian, I say, because I like animals better alive. And I used to eat fish because I love the taste of fish and so there was a period during which I stopped eating other animals but continued to eat fish. Then the breaking point for me was when one day my mom came home with a whole fish that was still complete, with the eyes and everything. So, you know, I named it. And we became “friends.” It looked like a live animal. And then I was like, oh, wait, we're eating it? That was the end of the infatuation. I was eleven when I first became vegetarian and a teen when I stopped eating fish. There was a period when a lot of my teenage girl friends would go through being vegetarian. And my dad was like, oh, it's a phase! So, we joke to this day, that I'm still vegetarian to prove to him that it's not just a phase. – But it grew on me.

KEVIN: Tell me about your background.

DANA: Well, I was born in Austin, and I never left. I grew up near 183 at Spicewood Springs. I was in the first kindergarten class of Laurel Mountain Elementary School and then, Canyon Vista Middle School, and Westwood High School, followed by UT. Then I moved to live in Northwest Hills.

KEVIN: What did you study at UT?

DANA: My major was corporate communication. I'm not sure what was intended by the major, but I feel like it's a good general major for being in any kind of business. Communication is a handy skill to have no matter what you do. I'm putting it to use in a way I'm not sure that UT envisioned me doing, but every day I'm communicating, so it's been helpful.

KEVIN: How did you decide on your professional career?

DANA: I was hired by Accenture starting right out of school. We had been Anderson Consulting for a while, and I joined right after the name changed to Accenture in June of 2001.

KEVIN: What are you doing at Accenture?

DANA: I've spent most of my career in internal roles in our quality organization - focused on quality and process improvement and risk management. I led root cause analysis for several

years.

KEVIN: So that's internal quality, right? You monitor projects that the Accenture consultants are doing to see how well they're meeting customer expectations and that kind of thing?

DANA: That's a lot of what I've done. I joined this global group where we work virtually. So, I've been working from home since before it was cool, for 18 years. Working from home was very rare when I started - how's that gonna work? I'm not going to see people, and I like to see people. I mean we've all experienced it, but it was different back then because we didn't have the technology that we have today.

KEVIN: What kind of projects are your associates doing at Accenture that you're monitoring?

DANA: We do pretty much everything. We're kind of known for technology but we actually do just as much in the outsourcing space. We do a lot of business process outsourcing, strategy work, and digital cloud work. Really, any kind of professional services. And our clients span all industries and governments. For example, we run the Medicaid system for the state of Texas, as well as for several other states - both from a technology standpoint and in terms of claims processing and so forth. I helped get that project started in 2003 by setting up the quality system.

KEVIN: That's gotta involve a lot of people.

DANA: When I was on it, there were about twelve hundred people total. We have over 700,000 employees worldwide. But if there's niche skills that we need, we do hire contractors. I remember going public as Accenture because I was brand new. It was 2001. I was 21 and I didn't know what an IPO was. I later became aware that investing in your company can be a good thing - which I eventually benefitted from. Accenture does a lot of acquisitions and we've recently acquired a number of companies. In my early career I enjoyed doing quality certifications according to CMMI - a software quality standard. Joyce Statz, NWACA's current president, was one of the founders of a company that used this model. I interned there when I was in high school.

KEVIN: I read in your bio (note - its available on the NWACA web) that you spend your time with your daughter Kayla, with your chihuahua Snow, and watching UT football. So do you have other hobbies or interests?

DANA: I spend most of my available time volunteering at this point. I'm now involved in a number of organizations and boards.

KEVIN: I know that volunteering on boards can take a lot more time and effort than most people realize. How do you manage several boards including NWACA while working for Accenture?

DANA: I'm excited about being on the NWACA board – it's one of the boards that I've been wanting to join for a while. Joyce invited me for the first time several years ago, but I was starting to get very involved in United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, where I'm now a vice president - so that's been taking a lot of time. Over the following years, she invited me again, and I agreed. Judaism has a tradition that if someone wants to convert to Judaism, you're supposed to turn them down three times to make sure that they are really serious. So, I said yes to Joyce the third time.

But also, I've been thinking about retirement even though it's a ways off - but I'm a big planner. I've still got some time before I retire. I was particularly moved by the proposition that came up about two years ago on the homeless, the camping ban. I was so motivated that I decided when I retire, I'm going to end homelessness in Austin! Of course, one person cannot do that alone. But if you don't try, then you never achieve anything. I thought if I'm going to end homelessness in Austin, I need to start getting involved civically and learn more about Austin outside of the Jewish community. I need to learn about the different organizations in Austin and how one navigates a system here and learn who's who. So, I joined the NWACA board, hoping to learn and be trained in the Civic Engagement Committee where there was an immediate vacancy as the chair. Joyce agreed if I chair it, she will teach me. So, I became the chair of the Civic Engagement Committee which has been great! We work with the other neighborhood associations nearby when we do the election forums like the mayoral election.

Homelessness is not a problem that will go away quickly, no matter what. It's super complicated and it seems that there are so many different organizations in Austin that are a piece of the puzzle. It's not an easy answer to have government running this. It's really a lot of nonprofit organizations that are doing a lot of the work. I was impressed that we were able to eliminate homelessness for veterans. I'm not sure if that's still the case anymore, but at one time we achieved it.

KEVIN: So, what about music? I'll give you a couple of choices - which do you prefer: Taylor Swift or Willie Nelson? Or, if those don't strike a chord in you, who else?

DANA: I like both of them! Anything with a good beat, a good rhythm. I'm not a connoisseur or anything. It just doesn't take much for me to dance. I did drill team in high school, so I did dance for a while with some more structure and instruction, but now it's just for fun.

KEVIN: You've been a lifelong Austinite. What do you like most that you see as positive for the future of Austin?

DANA: It's funny because everyone who moves here gets nostalgic about Austin. But whatever year they moved here - that was the ideal Austin. And then since then, the traffic's gotten worse, etcetera. But I've always loved Austin. I love KEEP AUSTIN WEIRD. I love everything that makes us weird. I love the diversity. I love how progressive it is. The one thing that does make me sad is the affordability issue, because I feel like a lot of the people who make Austin Austin can't afford to live in Austin anymore. We have so many wonderful people – artists, musicians,

and teachers. I just wish that we could make it affordable for them. Oh, the bluebonnets. I also love the bluebonnets.

KEVIN: What would you say is your superpower?

DANA: Is planning a superpower? If, at this point in my life, I'm already planning what I will do in retirement, I think that's at least a good intention. For either planning or follow through, I'm reliable. If I say I'm doing something, it's one hundred percent good. I guess that's my superpower.

KEVIN: What is your hope for your daughter Kayla?

DANA: What I want most for Kayla is for her to be Kayla.

KEVIN: What's your hope for the future of Austin?

DANA: I hope that our residents feel safe, seen and housed. I guess there's a theme of home there - both in terms of a physical home but also, the place to feel safe and be seen.