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## Cherise Cartwright

An Entrepreneur Who Really Digs It!

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By Cynthia Robinson

Photography by Mike Force Photography

“Entrepreneur, commercial realtor, mom, mentor, volunteer and construction expert are just a few of the many hats St. Simons Island resident Cherise Cartwright wears on a daily basis. But that wasn’t always the plan.

“I grew up in a little bubble in Wellington (Florida), a small, equestrian town known for polo. My family’s business was real estate and construction, and I thought I would be doing anything but that,” she laughed, adding originally she planned on being a journalist. “I wanted to be independent, leave home and get a corporate job.”

After graduating from Wellington High School, Cherise attended Florida Atlantic University and earned a bachelor’s degree in communications. That’s also where she met her husband, Dialo Cartwright. After marrying, the two set their sights on Atlanta, where Dialo went to work for Georgia Power, and she entered the corporate work world with Citigroup. Cherise said after two years, she was burned out and “left to have babies. My husband and I agreed one of us should stay home with them.”

Cherise treasured the time she spent at home with the couple’s two children, Dawson, now 12, and Olivia Jane, now 7, but as they grew, she wanted to expand her horizons. “I was a stay-at-home mom for seven years, and then I started feeling like I needed something else to do. When I left corporate America, I vowed I would be a stay-at-home mom and never get back in the family business, but now, it’s exactly what I’m doing!”

She started with buying small, affordable rental properties in the Bloomfield area of Macon, where her husband had been transferred with Georgia Power. “I was flipping small, affordable rental apartments and houses and

loved it.” At that point, with her husband’s encouragement, she pursued and obtained her real estate license, and her career took off from there.

She was so successful as a relator, having closed 28 real estate transactions her first full year, she was awarded the 2015 Middle Georgia Rookie of the Year by the Middle Georgia Board of Realtors. Afterwards, she founded her own agency, Oglethorpe Realty, where she found success in building new homes in previously blighted neighborhoods, including Macon’s Beall’s Hill community. “I like building unique, non cookie cutter housing at an affordable price point for the average person.”

Cherise was also able to purchase and convert several properties for short-term rentals and obtained her certification as a real estate negotiations expert, as well as certification as an international property expert. She said the key to her success is communication. “The main thing you need to have to run a successful construction site is good communication skills.”

After living in Macon and Savannah, the family relocated again to St. Simons Island in December, 2019, for Dialo’s Georgia Power job. (He was promoted July 2020 to area manager) “I’ve been basically a trailing spouse since I met my husband, and I embrace that role. One, is that I want to be a supportive spouse, and two, I bloom where I’m planted. We went from Atlanta, well, Peachtree City, to Macon, to Savannah, back to Macon, now here on St. Simons. I just pivot.”

Her first pivot when moving to the Golden Isles was to sell the real estate arm of her company to a former agent. Although not selling residential real estate in Glynn County, she is still owner and founder of the Oglethorpe Construction Group and continues as commercial realtor and developer with Cartwright International Real Estate Services. Currently, Cherise splits her time between projects in Coastal Georgia and Macon, where she is converting her office in the city’s historic downtown into an apartment to use while she is overseeing projects there. “I often find myself doing a juggling act of the whole work/life integration, which allows me the opportunity to best serve my clients and family.”

Cherise has two things that excite her about the Golden Isles: 1. The possibility of expanding environmentally friendly construction, including solar energy and “green” building materials; and 2. The presence of the Golden Isles College and Career Academy (GICCA). “Locally, I serve on several non-profit boards, including Glynn Environmental Coalition (GEC) because I believe in preserving our waters, airspace and environment. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t be doing more green construction in Glynn County. One of my favorite board positions is being the current vice chair at GICCA,” she said. “This is where I get to interact with female students, who I can assist and mentor to follow non-traditional pathways for women in construction, specifically in welding, carpentry, electrical and plumbing.”

Cherise feels that not everyone needs to attend a four-year college and incur crippling student loan debt to be successful. “There’s a lot of talent here in Brunswick, also a lot of jobs where students can actually get paid to study and get a job immediately after graduating. We have some of the best local trade schools, and they’re free



at GICCA for high school students. Then, they can get their trade certifications at Coastal Pines Technical College. GICCA shouldn't be a secret. It's a huge asset to the Golden Isles, and it's right here in Brunswick for high schoolers."

Being able to give back to the community is central in all Cherise does. "I love working and mentoring the students at the Career Academy. I'm hoping in 2021, we can get some students to build one of the tiny homes for veterans. So talented, they could do the framing, electrical and plumbing."

While she loves working in real estate and construction, she said there is one downside. "I have a hard time just relaxing. I incorporate work into everything, and I'm always looking for my next project. My blessing and curse are I can survive on a limited amount of sleep, and insomnia sparks a lot of my creating thinking late at night."

Whatever the new year and beyond brings, Cherise is up for the challenge. "Taking the leap from homemaker to mompreneur has been a rollercoaster ride. And, I've enjoyed every twist and turn."

#### UP CLOSE:

**Kiwanian at Heart:** In 7th grade, I joined the Kiwanis Builders Club—the start of my life-long passion for community service. I'm currently a member of Brunswick Kiwanis Club and prior to that, Downtown Macon, and Downtown Savannah Kiwanis Clubs.

**Leading the Way:** Cherise is a Leadership Macon and Middle Georgia Regional Leadership Champions graduate. She is currently attending Leadership Glynn and will begin Leadership Southeast Georgia in 2021.

**More Volunteering:** At her children's school, Heritage Academy, and her family's church, St. William Catholic; also supports numerous community events with her husband as part of his job role.

**Whirlwind Romance:** Dialo and I met, got engaged and married within five weeks. A lot of people thought it was a shotgun wedding, but we didn't have our first baby until three years later! I was 24 and he was 26, and we married the weekend of Hurricane Katrina. Married 15 years now, I think it worked out!

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