

Dear Salty Sisters,

My name is **Kim Kuruzovich**, Class of 2022, and I am thrilled to be a Salty Sister!

I'd like to share a little about myself and my background. My family moved from New Jersey to Florida when I was 13 years old, and I've called Florida home ever since. I earned my master's degree from Florida State University along with certifications in four different areas of special education. I taught elementary special education in the Pinellas County Public School System for 13 years.

During that time, I met and married my husband, Mike, and together we raised two wonderful children. Our son, Matt, is 33 years old and married to his lovely wife, Lauren. They currently live in Brooklyn, New York, where they have built a wonderful life together. They are expecting their first child, a son, which means Mike and I will soon welcome our first grandchild. I am absolutely thrilled to finally join the grandparents' club!

We are also proud parents of our daughter, Gina, who is 31. Gina was born with autism and intellectual disabilities and has been a tremendous blessing to our family in ways we never could have imagined. Today, Gina is employed by Pinellas County Schools and works in the cafeteria of an elementary school. We are incredibly proud of her accomplishments, her independence, and the positive impact she has on the students and staff she works with each day. After Gina was born, I retired from teaching so I could stay home and raise both of my children. I have always been grateful for the opportunity to be there for them during those important years.

When Gina was in sixth grade, I returned to teaching at the private school she attended. Later, when she was in eleventh grade, a dear friend of mine, Keli Mondello, and I decided to open a school for individuals with neurodiverse learning needs. For those unfamiliar with the term, "neuro" refers to the brain and "diversity" refers to the many ways people differ. We believe that every person is neurologically unique, and our goal has always been to create an environment where individuals are valued for who they are and supported in reaching their fullest potential.

Our school, **LiFT (Learning Independence for Tomorrow)**, began with just 16 students spanning elementary, middle, and high school programs. Today, we serve more than 200 students and participants. In addition to our elementary, middle, and high school programs, we have added a transition program, an adult program, and three micro-businesses; LiFT Your Heart, where our adults make and sell products, LiFT Your Fork, a culinary program, and LiFT U Cleaning Crew. We are also opening up Bubba's Cafe within the next year. A few years ago, we purchased the former Clearwater YMCA, which now houses all of our programs under one roof. Our next venture is housing, which we have just dipped our toes into.

At LiFT, we teach students to advocate for themselves while providing the support they need to succeed. During my time there, I served as Executive Director, overseeing operations, while Keli led development efforts. Although I am no longer involved in the day-to-day management, I continue to serve on the Board of Directors and several committees, allowing me to remain active in the school's growth and future.

Retirement has also given me the opportunity to explore a few new interests and hobbies. In addition to continuing my involvement with LiFT through board and committee service and my participation with the Salty Sisters, I have become an enthusiastic beginning gardener, discovered a passion for cooking, and embraced the art of sourdough baking. While I am still learning in all three areas, I have found great joy in nurturing a garden, experimenting with new recipes, and sharing fresh sourdough bread with family and friends. These hobbies have added a wonderful creative outlet to this season of my life and have taught me that there is always something new to learn.

It was during retirement that Mike and I joined the St. Petersburg Yacht Club. Early on, I learned about Salty Sisters from Anna Olecka. What immediately appealed to me was that it was an organization created by and for women. I had no sailing experience whatsoever, although Mike and I are powerboaters. My first sailing experience was with Els in an Ideal, and we had such a wonderful time! Soon after, I attended the March party, and the rest, as they say, is history.

There are so many things I love about Salty Sisters. One of the things I appreciate most is that there are numerous ways to become involved. Over the past several years, I've dealt with a few injuries that have limited my ability to sail, but I have been fortunate to participate in Safety Ashore alongside my wonderful mentors, Joan and Tricia.

For the past three years, I have also helped manage the Salty Sister Store, most recently with Connie Smith. One of the unexpected joys of working in the store has been the opportunity to meet so many of you. Sooner or later, everyone stops by the store, and it has been a wonderful way to get to know our members.

Most of all, I value the camaraderie that Salty Sisters foster. I love the traditions that have been carried forward over the years, as well as the new ideas and opportunities that help us continue to grow and evolve. The friendships, support, and sense of community within this organization are truly special.

I have been continually inspired by the friendship, support, and camaraderie that make this organization so special. Through experiences such as sailing, Safety Ashore and helping with the Salty Sister Store, I have had the privilege of getting to know many of you and witnessing firsthand the dedication of our members. I am grateful for the opportunity to be considered for a board

position and would be honored to serve this wonderful organization. Thank you again for your support, encouragement, and friendship.

Warm regards,

Kim Kuruzovich

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