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DEBRA WALTON-WELLS

*Manager, Inclusion and Diversity
Louisville Gas & Electric and
Kentucky Utilities Energy, LLC.*

by Michael L. Jones

Debra Walton-Wells moved to Louisville in 1995 to become Vice President of Human Resources at Brown-Foreman. It was the 11th time in her career that she had relocated for a job. After leaving Brown-Foreman in 2005, Walton-Wells started New Seasons, a business that helped non-profits with organizational issues. In 2011, she became the Manager of Inclusion and Diversity at Louisville Gas and Electric (LG&E) and K U. Many of Walton-Wells' friends can't believe she has stayed in the River City for so long.

"People are often surprised at how much I love Louisville," she said. "But it is just the right size for me and I think this city is on the precipice of being great. It has all the raw ingredients to be a truly great, compassionate city."

Walton-Wells lives in the Highlands neighborhood with her husband Brian Wells, provost of Simmons College of Kentucky and pastor of Westwood Presbyterian Church. The couple was married four years ago and they enjoy taking in plays at Actor's Theatre and exploring Louisville's celebrated culinary scene. Some of their favorite restaurants are Highland Morning, Asiatique, and Café Lou Lou.

Walton-Wells is so dedicated to the Bluegrass State that she moved her mother to Louisville after her father's recent death. Her daughter, Briana, and grandson, Victor Joshua, relocated here from North Carolina four years ago. "For the first year and half, Briana hated it," Walton-Wells said. "But then she

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got connected to the right folks. I think that's the key to loving Louisville, you gotta be connected. You got to be at the right church. You gotta be at the right work place and neighborhood. She now loves it."

Walton-Wells grew up in Detroit with a brother, a father who worked as a truck driver, and her mother, a registered nurse. She spent most of her summers in Shreveport, LA, where both of her parents were born. "I would leave right after the last day of school and not come back until the day before the new school year began," Walton-Wells remembered. "I used to try to figure out what my parents could do with all that time to themselves. Now that I'm older, I'm sure that they appreciated it."

After high school, Walton-Wells attended the University of Michigan and Wright State University, earning bachelor's degrees in English and Journalism. "Originally, I thought I was going to be a lawyer," she said. "I was going to be the next Perry Mason. But I had a lot of trouble with the political science courses."

Walton-Wells received a master's degree in Organizational Development at American University in Washington, D.C. "I have been and still am fascinated by the way we get things done in the workplace," she said. "Organizational development was a fit for figuring out what are the overt and covert processes of how things get done in the work place."

Walton-Wells began her career with General Motors. In her current position as manager of Inclusion and Diversity at LG&E she is responsible for making sure the company attracts and promotes women, people of color, veterans, and the handicapped. She also provides diversity training for all the company's employees and does whatever else is necessary to shift LG&E's culture towards inclusion.

Walton-Wells is a 2001 graduate of Leadership Louisville, a Leadership Connector and in 2005 she was voted "Most Admired Woman Business Owner" by *Today's Woman* magazine. She serves on the boards of the Healing Place, the St. George Scholar Institute, the National Alliance of Mental Illness, and the Business Diversity Network of Kentucky, Inc.

