

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

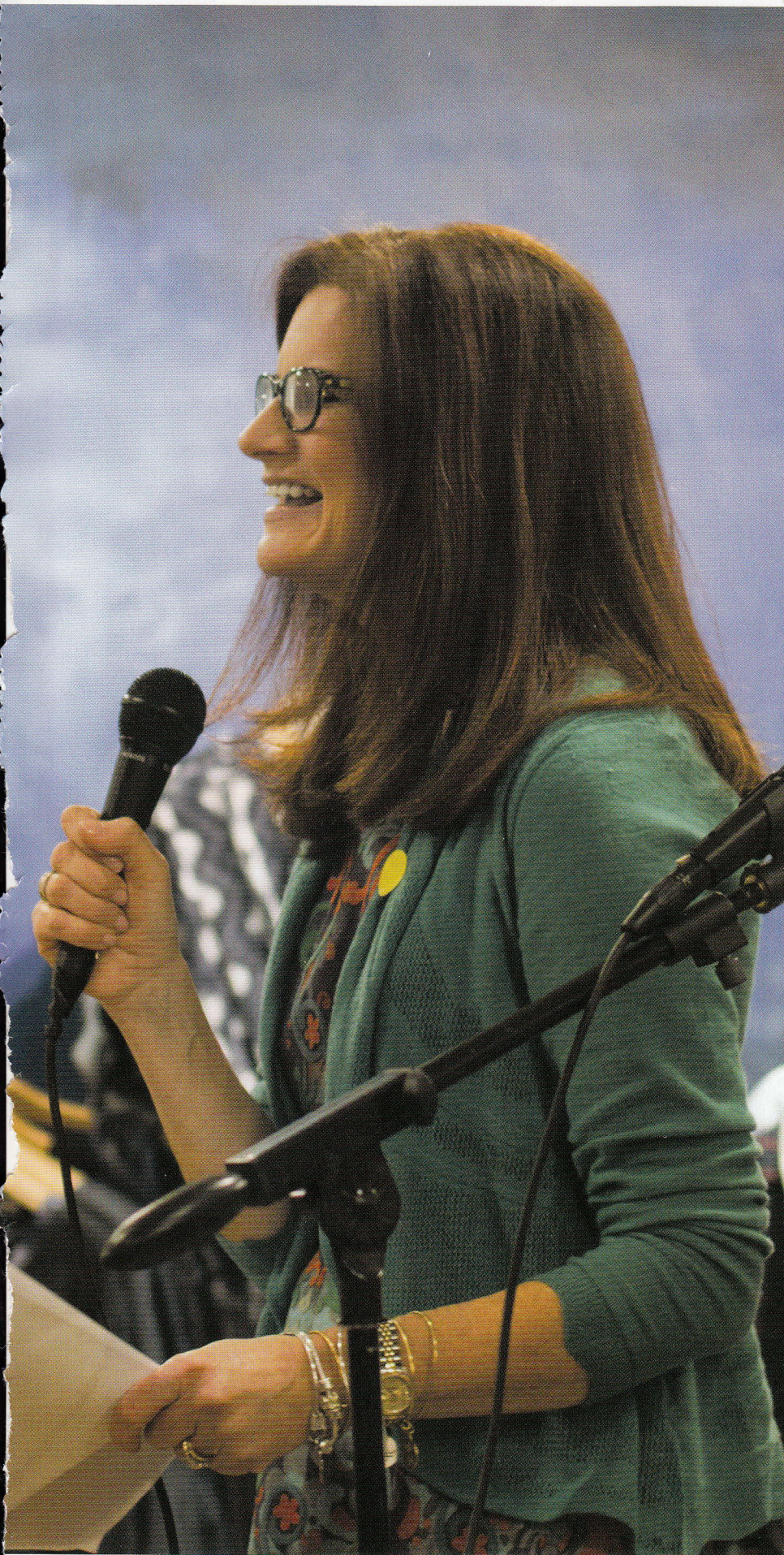
Hub Dot DC

“SOMETIMES REALITY IS TOO COMPLEX.
STORIES GIVE IT FORM.”

— JEAN-LUC GODARD, FILM DIRECTOR

BY MEREDITH EHLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTY JENKINS & ANGELA GOODHART



Two small words — Hub. Dot. Separately they don't mean much, but put together they're electric. Hub Dot is the latest British invasion to make it across the pond. Chances are, if you have a friend or relative in Europe they already know about this women's networking organization.

Hub Dot launched in the United States the fall of 2014. Houston and Portland were the first cities to host events. Born from the mind of Londoner Simona Barbieri, a native of Italy, Hub Dot was created to provide an environment where women could meet and make meaningful connections. Over 200 women attended the first Hub Dot DC meeting, hosted by Anthropologie at the Reston Town Center in Reston, Virginia.

Upon arrival the attendees, or "Dotties," as they're affectionately termed, are greeted by a group of smiling faces and tempted with shopping as they're tasked with grouping themselves by the dot they feel most closely identifies them. It's all about the dots, ladies! Each colored dot sticker represents the purpose of an individual's attendance.

THE MEANING OF DOTS:

RED: I am established (in my career/business/motherhood).

YELLOW: I have an idea, can anyone help?

GREEN (*the most frequently chosen dot*): I'm here to be inspired.

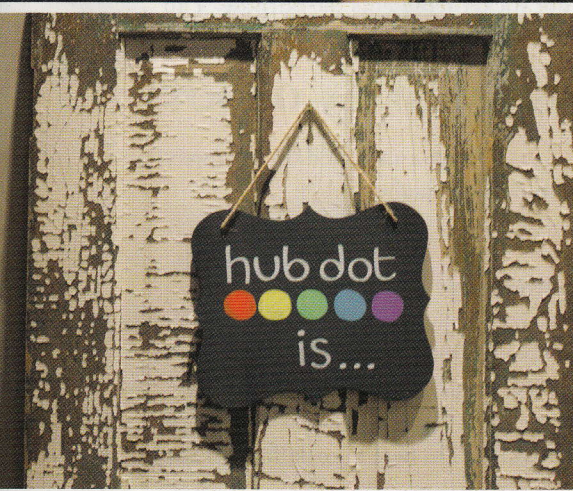
BLUE: I'm here to socialize and shop.

PURPLE: I want to tell you about my story, my work, my charity.

Simona, along with Hub Dot's COO Aurelia Hull, hosted a pre-event luncheon for the DC team to get better acquainted with the Hub Dot approach. Simona spoke about how she came up with the dot concept at her kitchen table, referring to it as "dot alchemy." In this low-pressure, ultra-friendly environment, women who may otherwise pass each other on the street now chat together, and thus connections are made. Some of these connections are life changing. The global relevancy of the Hub Dot movement is



"SIMONA SPOKE ABOUT HOW SHE CAME UP WITH THE DOT CONCEPT AT HER KITCHEN TABLE, REFERRING TO IT AS 'DOT ALCHEMY.'"





evident during lunch when Simona exclaimed, “Luxembourg’s event has begun!”

Each event features speakers, but these are not the “stand at a lectern and present your PowerPoint slides” type of speakers. These are real women sharing their stories in just one-minute timeframes. Our event had ten speakers, myself included. Speakers told of struggles with alcoholism, disease and its effects on a family, and about numerous charities that have been started. Getting to hear all of the different stories and learning about our similarities felt like it was connecting us all.

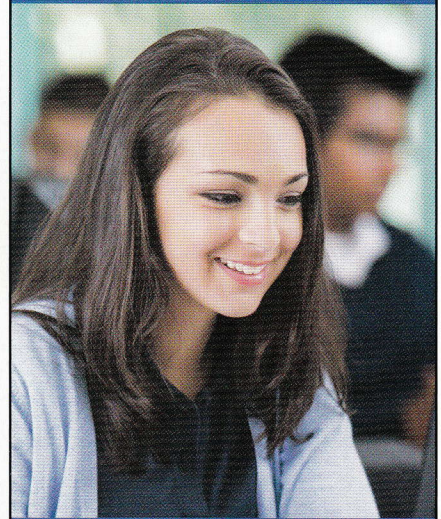
One of my favorite parts of the night was meeting women who have attended other Hub Dot events around the world. Two women, one from Barcelona and another from England (both speakers), were there to help us launch and each shared her story. Another woman attended an event in Europe and has since moved to Miami, so she attended our event in an effort to learn more about launching a Hub Dot Miami.

Winding my way through the gathering of women, I ran into a girlfriend expressing how much she was enjoying the night. She made the distinction that she considers herself an introvert, but that even she was opening up and having fun. The feeling that all are welcome permeated the evening.

As the night drew to a close, the local team leader, or “Ville Leader,” Kristen Staples wrapped up the evening. Shoppers shopped, hashtags were live-tweeted, Dotties mingled and connected. I trust that many special connections have begun as a result of real women stripping off their labels and sticking on their dots.

MEREDITH EHLER is a makeup artist, wardrobe stylist, and home decorator. She studied fashion at JMU and in Paris, France. A native to DC and former Redskins’ cheerleader, Meredith enjoys making her clients’ lives more beautiful. Her website is MeredithEhler.com.

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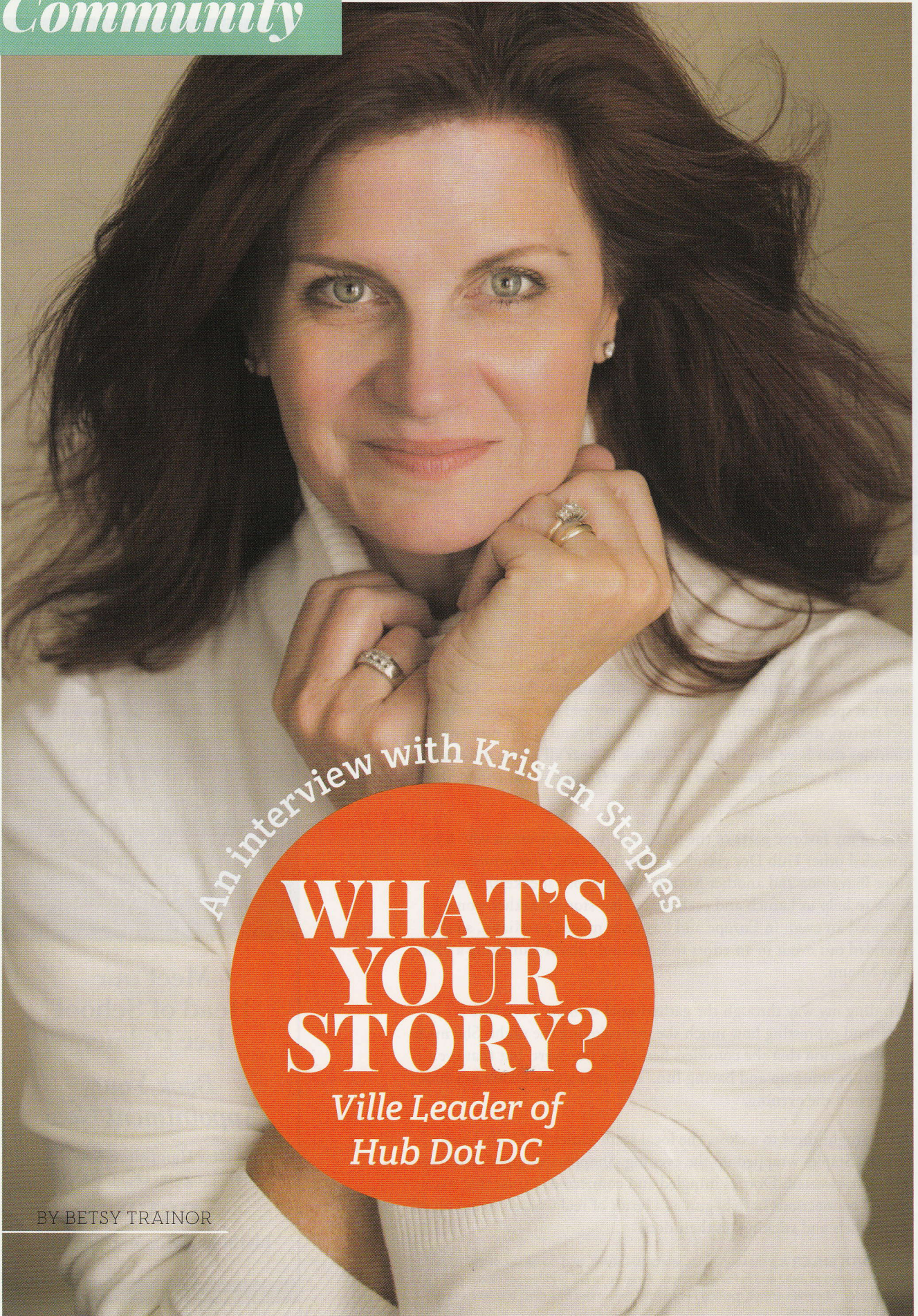
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An interview with Kristen Staples

**WHAT'S
YOUR
STORY?**

*Ville Leader of
Hub Dot DC*

BY BETSY TRAINOR

Kristen Staples recently launched Hub Dot for Washington, DC. Hub Dot is a global organization using storytelling and personal connection to bring women from diverse walks of life, experiences, and backgrounds together under one umbrella of sharing. Kristen is a professional photographer, loving mom, world traveler, Northern Virginia resident, and a true inspiration.

BT: How did you first hear about Hub Dot?

KS: My best friend in the whole world lives in Barcelona and was part of the team that launched Hub Dot there. She told me about it last May, and I immediately fell in love with the concept. I asked her to introduce me to Simona Barbieri, the founder, last summer.

BT: What made you decide to take on the role as Ville Leader in DC?

KS: The more I talked to Simona, the more I knew this was something I had to do. I have always wanted to find a way to help women. Even with my photography, I've found myself more interested in the women and their stories than in taking their pictures. I'm a natural connector; I like to make connections that help people. Hub Dot's mission is something I do very naturally.

BT: Let's talk about the dots at Hub Dot events, which inspire conversations between women. Each dot-sticker's color represents the purpose for attendance. RED dots are looking for conversations about career, motherhood, or business. YELLOW dots are seeking input for an idea. GREEN dots strive to be inspired, and BLUE dots are hoping to socialize and shop. PURPLE dots share stories about work, charity, and personal life experiences. Which dot do you sport most frequently and why?

KS: It's often hard to choose just one, as women are all of these things at different times. However, choosing a dot that best represents your state of mind during an event will help you make more meaningful connections. For example, if you have an idea (yellow dot), it might be best to talk to a woman with a red dot, as she's clearly established in her field and can possibly help. I'm almost always a green dot, as I never get tired of being inspired. I love to hear women's moving stories and strive to learn from them.

BT: How would you describe the energy at a Hub Dot event?

KS: It is unlike any other event I've experienced. The mood is supportive, empowering, encouraging. When you meet another woman at the event, you can get a deeper understanding of who she is, of her story. In Portland, for example, I met three women who had lost their children to cancer. I decided to ask them for advice on how to be a good friend to someone in that situation, and they gave me a ton. After you share such intimate stories, you feel more like you've made a friend. It's so much more than the usual exchange of business cards at a networking event.

BT: Why do you think this happens?

KS: There are several reasons. One is that we have stripped

off the labels. No more "VP of XYZ" or "stay-at-home mom." We are women: young or old, rich or poor, in the workforce or at home. That provides a safe environment in which women can talk to each other without feeling intimidation or classification. Another is that our speakers set the tone for soulful conversation. These speakers are not necessarily women who've been highly successful in their career or who are famous; they're ordinary women like you and me who have wisdom and experience to share. That's when the real dot alchemy happens.

BT: Connecting with other women is so important. Do you worry that social media is allowing women to slip away from real conversations?

KS: Recently we had a small gathering of women and began sharing stories. One woman later said that what she had been lacking was face-to-face interaction. Simona Barbieri was looking for a way to connect her friends from different parts of her life face to face. Hub Dot is now entering the online world and creating a "Digital Piazza" in which women can continue the meaningful connections they've started at an event. We anticipate the site being live this summer.

BT: I read that you consider yourself a risk-taker. What's the biggest risk you've ever taken?

KS: There are so many! I like to push myself past my comfort zone. I've lived abroad, moved all over the US, and as soon as I feel comfortable, I usually know it's time to push further. One of my biggest risks happened nine years ago. I left a very comfortable marketing salary and decided to become a full-time photographer. Allowing myself to be an artist, after years in business and even an MBA, was a big risk.

BT: Tell me about the new friendships you've made in your journey with Hub Dot.

KS: One of the coolest parts of this journey has been meeting women from all over the world. When I was in London for the 2nd anniversary of Hub Dot, I met women from Latvia, Luxembourg, Italy, Spain, UK, and Africa. Through Skype, Facebook, and email, I've been able to connect further with these women.

On a local level, I've made some beautiful friendships. I see that by supporting each other, helping each other, we will make the greater DC area an even stronger, safer, happier community.

BT: At the end of a long day, what inspires you to keep such a passionate perspective about women and the lives we lead?

KS: One thing I really love about Hub Dot is that it is for every woman. Every woman has a story to tell, and every story deserves to be heard. I never tire of meeting new people and knowing more about them.

BETSY TRAINOR resides in Loudoun County and is a mother of four. She is corporate counsel to a Northern Virginia business and enjoys running, reading, and freelance writing. You can read more about her daughter, Riley, and the inspirational story about her diabetes and her involvement in future research at poshseven.com/riley-trainor.html.