The lines between Keri Thomas' professional career and her volunteer activities are often blurred, and that’s just fine with her.

Cultivating relationships and building bridges is part of her job as director of community and government relations for Sutter Health. Thomas is also an outgoing advocate for the Sacramento region and she's eager to get involved any way she can.

"It is hard to separate volunteerism and my job," Thomas says. "I think our region is phenomenal, so anything I can do to help make it better, I want to be a part of that. I like to meet people outside my industry—it’s a big benefit personally and professionally."

Thomas was the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce’s volunteer of the year in 2010. She was also chair of her Leadership Sacramento cohort and is currently vice-chair of the Sacramento’s Capital-to-Capital program, which makes an annual trip to Washington, D.C. to represent the city.

Thomas started at Sutter as a community benefits coordinator in 1998. She says her master’s degree at Sac State gave her the tools to excel in her current position. Professors Bob Waste, Mary Kirlin and Rob Wassmer were particularly influential.

“All my professors were very good, but those three were really great,” Thomas says. “I fell in love with public policy and administration. The social equity piece of the degree fit my love and passion. The practicality of the classes at Sac State was so important.”

She inherited her outgoing personality from her father Robert P. Thomas, who held various positions in Sacramento City government over the past 30-plus years.

“I started going to community events at age 6 when he was director of parks and recreation,” Keri says. “I think that’s when I learned about the power of relationships. When you have that trust with people, that’s when the most meaningful conversations can happen.”

Sac State and Sutter have developed a strong relationship as the University’s role in the health care field continues to grow. The University is training a skilled workforce and providing interns while Sutter provides scholarship support and placement opportunities.

“Workforce development relationships are critical,” Thomas says. “We need to hire trained, well-prepared professionals and Sac State is doing everything right in order to provide those workers. It’s our local university and we find that a lot of people want to stay in this region and work. We’re one of four major health care providers in this community so that’s huge.”

Thomas' dedication to Sacramento is deeply rooted. She returned to her hometown after earning her bachelor’s degrees in exercise sports science and Spanish from Oregon State. She opted for the administrative side of health care and hasn’t looked back.

“I like being creative and figuring out the puzzle to achieve an outcome,” Thomas says. “I think that’s something I bring to Sutter and the community.”