



Light a Fire 2012
A CELEBRATION OF GIVING



meet the

HONOREES



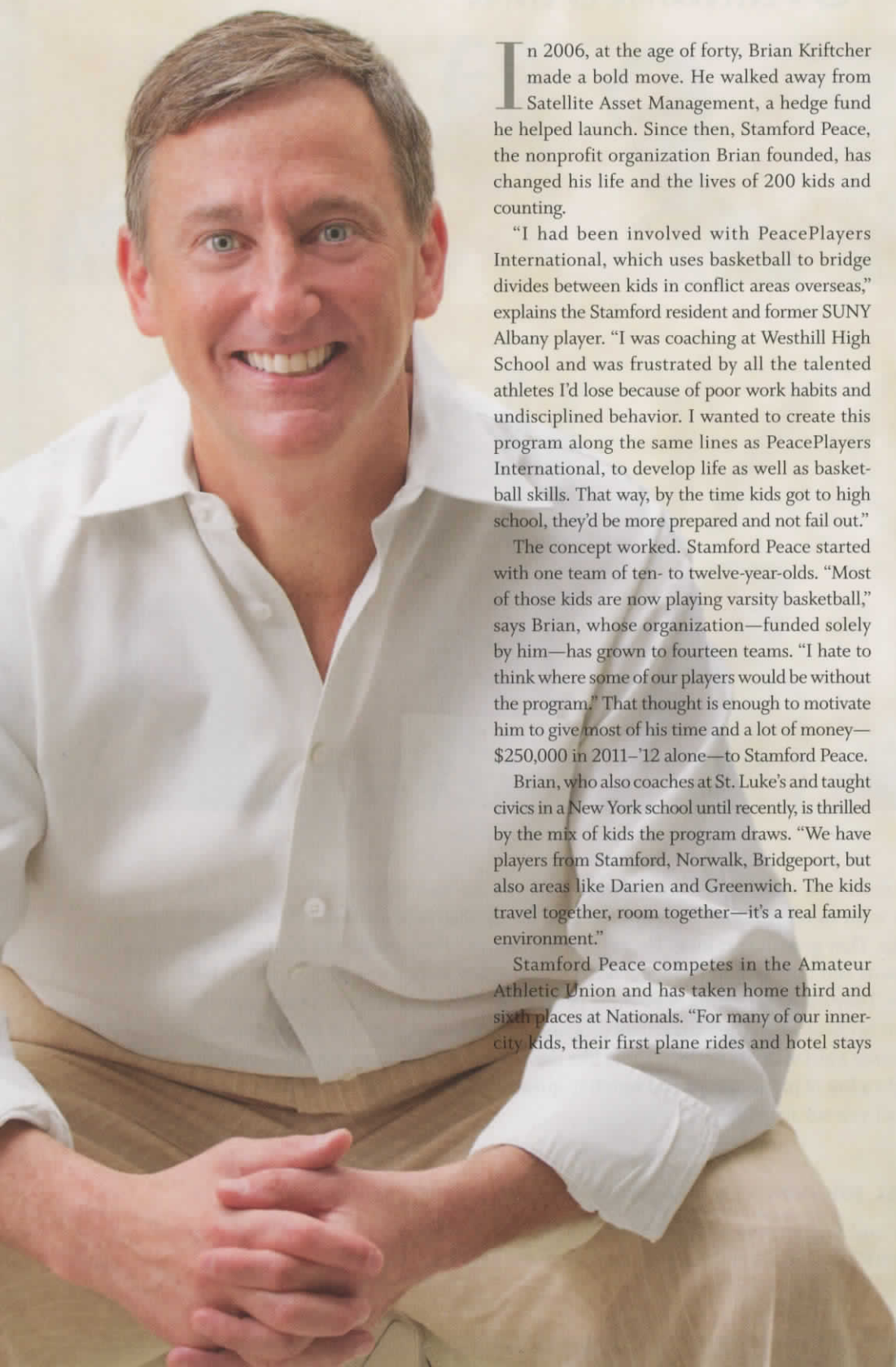
As we approach the holidays, most of us start thinking about giving—what we'll buy for our loved ones, what we want in return. But that's not the case for the Fairfield County model citizens profiled in these pages. They give all year long. They give time, money, talent and pieces of their heart. They give to their towns and they give to strangers oceans away. They want something in return but it's nothing you can buy in a store. They want the feeling of swelling pride when they see a child in Kenya sit in the schoolhouse they built. They want to cheer when their basketball program turns an inner-city teen into a star, both on the court and off. They want to see a girl who has nothing smile like she has everything, even if for just one strut down a runway. They want to light a fire of philanthropy and watch it spread across the world. Congratulations to our honorees. We are proud to call you our neighbors. »

by **JILL JOHNSON** • photographs by **WILLIAM TAUFIC**

hair and makeup by **NOBLE SALON** of **STAMFORD**:
DEBORAH CAPUTO, DANIELLE FECTEAU, COCO JIANG and ERICA PARONICH

Outstanding PHILANTHROPIST

{ BRIAN KRIFTCHER }



In 2006, at the age of forty, Brian Kriftcher made a bold move. He walked away from Satellite Asset Management, a hedge fund he helped launch. Since then, Stamford Peace, the nonprofit organization Brian founded, has changed his life and the lives of 200 kids and counting.

"I had been involved with PeacePlayers International, which uses basketball to bridge divides between kids in conflict areas overseas," explains the Stamford resident and former SUNY Albany player. "I was coaching at Westhill High School and was frustrated by all the talented athletes I'd lose because of poor work habits and undisciplined behavior. I wanted to create this program along the same lines as PeacePlayers International, to develop life as well as basketball skills. That way, by the time kids got to high school, they'd be more prepared and not fail out."

The concept worked. Stamford Peace started with one team of ten- to twelve-year-olds. "Most of those kids are now playing varsity basketball," says Brian, whose organization—funded solely by him—has grown to fourteen teams. "I hate to think where some of our players would be without the program." That thought is enough to motivate him to give most of his time and a lot of money—\$250,000 in 2011-'12 alone—to Stamford Peace.

Brian, who also coaches at St. Luke's and taught civics in a New York school until recently, is thrilled by the mix of kids the program draws. "We have players from Stamford, Norwalk, Bridgeport, but also areas like Darien and Greenwich. The kids travel together, room together—it's a real family environment."

Stamford Peace competes in the Amateur Athletic Union and has taken home third and sixth places at Nationals. "For many of our inner-city kids, their first plane rides and hotel stays

have been on these trips," says Brian. "I get letters saying 'Thanks for an unbelievable experience. I realize now what it's going to take, and I can't wait until next year.' More than wins, that's success to me."

At the Hall of Fame Invitational this year a referee told "Coach K," "I've been reffing for thirty-five years, and I've never seen a group of kids who were better as a combination of sportsmen and players."

Growing up on Long Island, Brian looked up to his father, a college basketball player and renowned educator on Manhattan's Lower East Side, and his mom, a teacher in Queens. Brian's three daughters, all Stamford Peace players, are learning from their dad too—and vice versa. "In a moment of doubt, I asked them what they tell their friends that their father does for work," recounts Brian. "They said, 'We tell them you're a basketball coach and a teacher.' I asked what they said I used to do. They replied, 'We don't know what you used to do.'"

The list of what their dad does is long. As the new chairman of PeacePlayers International, Brian visited the West Bank in Israel, where players with bigger differences than kids from Darien and Norwalk united on the court and off. "I never would have imagined eating dinner in a Palestinian's home, with Jews and Arabs together," says Brian, who is Stamford Jewish Community Center's (JCC) past board president and supports numerous other causes. He's modest about his financial contributions, but they total several million dollars, including \$1.5 million to the JCC alone.

"I look at it as if my twenty years of for-profit earnings are being spread across the balance of my not-for-profit career," he says. "The rewards of my current work are purely the gratification that comes from having an impact on our community and the future generations."

Ernest Lamour, CEO of the YMCA of Stamford, comments: "Brian is truly a remarkable person. He's genuine and generous in all aspects of his life. There are very few Brians out there and no one more deserving of this award."

LIFETIME *Achievement* AWARD

{ BOB AND SUZANNE WRIGHT }

This page is hardly sufficient to outline the difference that Bob and Suzanne Wright have made in our community—and globally—since they settled in Southport in 1983. From the Bronx and Long Island, respectively, Suzanne and Bob recall humble Catholic upbringings. They were taught to help the needy. In forty-five years of marriage, they have continually applied this lesson, focusing not on their successes, but on enriching the lives of others.

Former vice chairman of General Electric, Bob says civic involvement “was part of the culture at GE. You get that in your blood. You see that you can make a difference.” When GE bought NBC, Bob became chairman and CEO of NBC Universal, a position that brought more connections and clout. Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward asked the Wrights to head up the campaign to renovate the Westport Country Playhouse, “to use our influence in the neighborhood,” as Bob puts it.

“Trying to raise \$30 million in 2001, after 9/11, wasn’t easy,” Bob continues, “but it’s such an iconic landmark. The idea that they would take it down and build a new one, and lose all that history, really motivated us.” Laura Silence, institutional giving manager at the Playhouse, comments, “There would be no Playhouse today without the Wrights’ extraordinary altruism, generosity and leadership.”

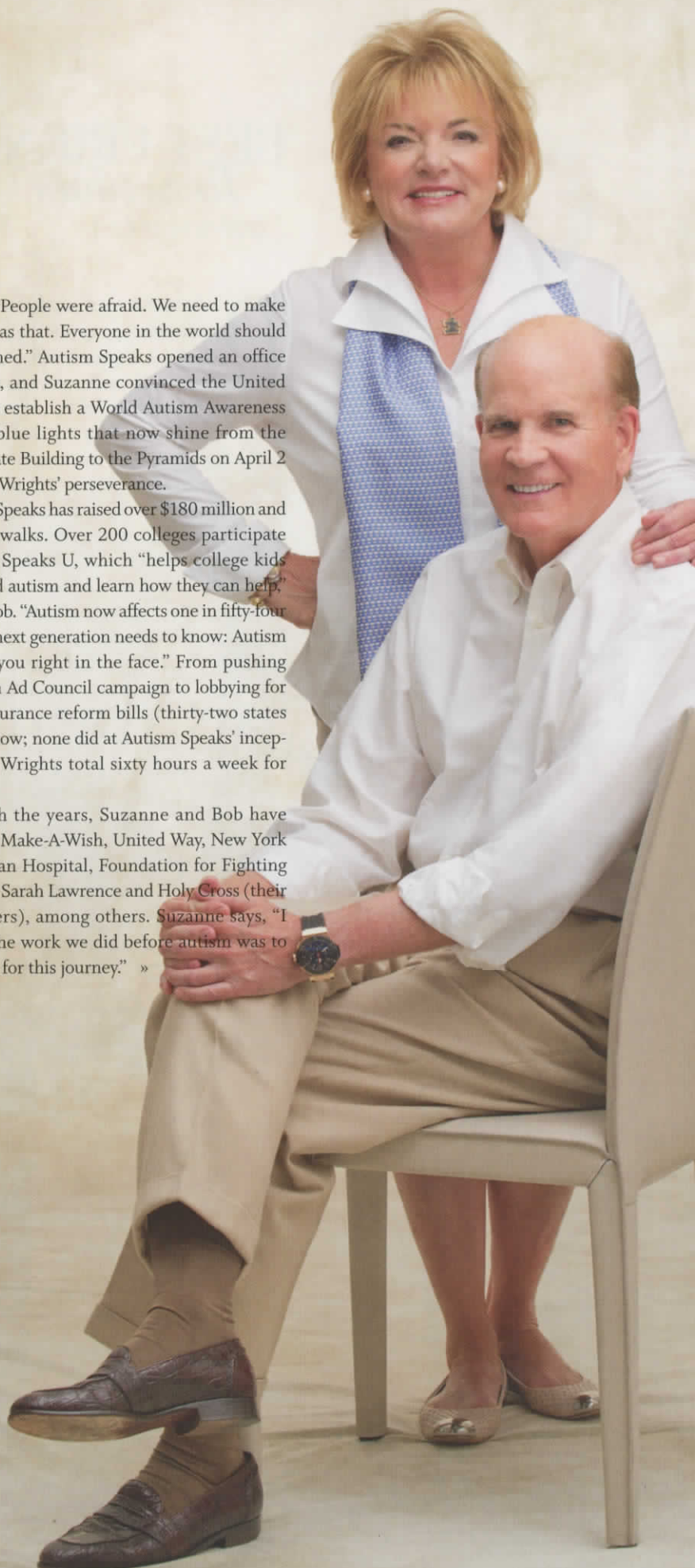
Soon after completing the Playhouse campaign, the Wrights got the devastating news that their grandson, Christian, had autism. “I was shocked by what we learned when we heard the diagnosis,” says Suzanne. “Bob was running a major media association and I had no idea about this disorder. The doctors told me one in 166 kids were affected [in 2004; now it is 1 in 88], and I thought, No one is talking about this?”

The Wrights jumped into action: NBC launched an Autism Week and Bob and Suzanne appeared on the *Today Show*. In 2005 they founded Autism Speaks, and using Bob’s M&A savvy, merged with three autism organizations across the U.S. But a global epidemic demanded more. “It’s the same as when the AIDS epidemic started,” explains

Suzanne. “People were afraid. We need to make this as big as that. Everyone in the world should be concerned.” Autism Speaks opened an office in London, and Suzanne convinced the United Nations to establish a World Autism Awareness Day. The blue lights that now shine from the Empire State Building to the Pyramids on April 2 reflect the Wrights’ perseverance.

Autism Speaks has raised over \$180 million and holds 100 walks. Over 200 colleges participate in Autism Speaks U, which “helps college kids understand autism and learn how they can help,” explains Bob. “Autism now affects one in fifty-four boys. The next generation needs to know: Autism is staring you right in the face.” From pushing through an Ad Council campaign to lobbying for autism insurance reform bills (thirty-two states have one now; none did at Autism Speaks’ inception), the Wrights total sixty hours a week for this cause.

Through the years, Suzanne and Bob have supported Make-A-Wish, United Way, New York Presbyterian Hospital, Foundation for Fighting Blindness, Sarah Lawrence and Holy Cross (their alma maters), among others. Suzanne says, “I think all the work we did before autism was to prepare us for this journey.” »





BEST FRIEND *To Seniors*

{ DORIS MCKEE }

Doris McKee became involved with the Alzheimer's Association when her husband was diagnosed with the disease in 1990. In 1996, the Norwalk resident created a support group for caregivers of Alzheimer's sufferers.

"I couldn't find a group that had meetings at a time that worked for me, and most only met once per month," says Doris. "I started with two meetings a month and in no time at all we were meeting weekly. It's a very tough disease. When you are caring for someone with Alzheimer's, you watch them disappear before your very eyes."

Although her husband is deceased now, Doris has continued to lead this group in the town where she has lived for fifty years. "That's quite a number!" quips Doris, a Detroit native who moved with her husband from New York to

Fairfield County. When he was struck with the disease, she explains that the first challenge was accepting the situation. "I kept saying, 'No, no, it can't be that. Anything but that.' But there's no way to change it. You have to accept it and do the best you can with the information and support that's available. Fortunately, there is a lot of help out there.

"A support group is so important. A lot of people in my group are dealing with different stages of the disease and can offer tips about what works and what doesn't. I get a lot of information from the association here in Norwalk to pass on. I'm so amazed continually by the help that comes out of sharing with others who are going through it."

Doris is a longtime member of the Alzheimer Association's Excellence in Caregiving luncheon committee. She also has participated in the annual Fairfield County Walk to End Alzheimer's since its inception in 1994 and led one of the top fundraising teams in 2011.

"Doris's diverse and consistent commitment to our organization's vision of a world without Alzheimer's is an asset to the community and the 70,000 people in Connecticut who are living with Alzheimer's," states Christy Kovel, senior director of communication at the Alzheimer's Association Connecticut Chapter.

Doris views her volunteer time as just the natural thing to do. "I learned more than I ever wanted to know about a disease I knew nothing about at the start," says Doris. "It's good to be able to help others get through it."

MOST INVOLVED IN *The Arts*

{ ANN SHEFFER }

Ann Sheffer's dedication to Westport and the arts has deep roots. Growing up here, she ushered at the Westport Country Playhouse. "As a young teenager [and a member of the Staples Players], that's where we hung out," comments Ann, who recently celebrated fifty years of involvement at the esteemed theater. A board member since 1999, she says, "The Playhouse is one of the reasons that Westport was known as an artist colony. It's a different sort of arts community now, but certainly there's lots of support for the Playhouse, the Levitt Pavilion, the Westport Arts Center... It's really a unique place."

Ann is an advocate for the arts on the local, state and national level. When she and her husband served on the RTM fifteen years ago, they proposed an ordinance to create an official committee to preserve and promote the town's artistic heritage. The resulting Westport Arts Advisory Committee has celebrated artists in all disciplines for the past nineteen years, especially young artists who got their start in school arts programs.

"Exposing kids to the arts in school helps them learn in other subjects and provides a critical dimension to their education," says Ann, who cites arts education as one of the most important causes she supports.

"Ann is one of Connecticut's leading arts advocates and funders," comments Karen Brown, VP of Programs at Fairfield County Community Foundation, where Ann created the Fairfield County Fund for Arts and Culture. Ann serves on the state's Advisory Committee for Culture and Tourism. She also serves on the board of Americans for the Arts and was a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities under Clinton.

"It's a never-ending battle to keep the funding on all levels," says Ann. "The arts are what keep communities alive and interesting, and they generate money: \$135 billion nationally and 4.5 million jobs." Through her family's foundation, Ann funded a breakout study on the economic impact of the arts specifically for Fairfield County. "The arts here generated \$130 million in spending—when you tabulate ticket prices, dinners out, babysitters, etc.—and nearly 4,000 jobs."

Ann could have had one of those jobs, backstage if not on it. She majored in theater at Smith College but claims, "I was a terrible actress. The year after I graduated, I ran the theater. It turned out that's what I like to do." After Smith, where Ann says, "We joked that we were learning how to be on committees," she got a masters in Arts Administration and an MBA. Ultimately, the mom of four chose to be "a professional volunteer." For that, Ann Sheffer deserves a standing ovation. »





CORPORATE GOOD *Neighbor* { RICH GRANOFF }

For all that Rich Granoff has done for the community, Greenwich really has his wife to thank. The couple was living in New York City when she took a job in Greenwich in 1988. “After a year of reverse-commuting, Jill and I decided to move to Greenwich, and I founded Granoff Architects here in town,” explains Rich, who graduated cum laude from Syracuse University’s School of Architecture. “Ironically, a few months later Jill took a job in the city and she has been commuting ever since. My office has been a mile from my house for twenty years.”

This convenience, claims Rich, is part of the reason he manages to sit on so many boards: Kids in Crisis, American Red Cross, Chabad Center, Greenwich Business Club and Arch Street Teen Center (plus, previously, the Whitby School, the Rock Ridge Association and Executives for Conservation). Granoff Architects does five to six

figures worth of pro bono work annually. Past projects include gut renovations and additions for Greenwich Adult Day Care, the American Red Cross and the Chabad Center of Greenwich; a renovation of the United Way headquarters; and a new research lab for the ONS Foundation. If only everyone who has a mile commute could do this much good.

“I think it’s very important to give back to our community,” says Rich. “Greenwich has been such a wonderful place to grow my business and raise my family.” As Granoff Architects grew to twenty-four design professionals, the Granoffs added two kids (Whitby alumni), who follow their parents’ altruistic lead. “They’ve cooked meals for Kids in Crisis and volunteered at many community events,” he says. “We also have them donate a percentage of monetary gifts they receive. I grew up in a household where giving back was a part of our lives. My wife and I share a similar philosophy toward philanthropy.”

Friend and colleague David Hirsch adds, “Rich and his wife, Jill, make constant generous donations to dozens of charities, including Women in Need, Foundation Fighting Blindness and UJA. Rich was head of the Building Committee of the Whitby School for nine years and really built most of the school.”

If you own a business but lack the time or funds to give back, Rich advises, “It’s all about balance, between work, family, friends and community service. Greenwich is a small community, and what goes around comes around. Local philanthropy is sincerely appreciated and recognized. Every local business should do their part, regardless of the dollar value.”

MOST DEDICATED *Committee* MEMBER

{ KARYN WARD }

Karyn Ward has been executive assistant to the co-CEO of the Ashforth Company for the past eighteen years, but she's been moonlighting at the Boys and Girls Club of Stamford (BGCS) for just as long. "Hank Ashforth was chairman of the BGCS in 1994 and was planning the Snowball Gala," recounts Karyn, who was born in Darien and lives in Stamford. "I love doing events and working with kids, so I offered to help." Since then, the Georgetown grad has gone from novice event planner to expert, chairing the gala (now called "City Chic") for the past decade.

Christine Larsen, chief development officer of BGCS, elaborates: "Karyn not only manages this large event, she also acquires over fifty silent auction items, handles all the décor herself, collects gift cards from area businesses, sells hundreds of tickets for the raffle, sets up and cleans up after the event. No job is too large or too small for Karyn."

A working mom, Karyn says, "When I was first doing the event, I got about five hours of sleep a night for four months. It was like having a newborn all over again." Her hard work, creativity, and organizational skills have paid off. The gala has grown from seventy guests to 250, and funds raised have jumped from \$60,000 to \$172,000. The best part: A wish-list board gives guests the opportunity to make children's dreams—art supplies, field trips, camps—come true. "The best part is seeing the looks on the kids' faces when they find out all the wish-list items that can be funded from donations—it's wonderful," says Karyn.

Last spring Karyn made eight trips to the mall to buy and exchange over fifty outfits for a spring fashion show, taking into account favorite colors in addition to correct sizes. "These kids don't have much," says Karyn, who wanted to make sure the clothes, which would be donated to the children,

were just right. "My husband came to the show," says Karyn. "He was watching them strut down the runway, with a look of 'I'm important too,' and he said, 'I was blown away. These kids and what you gave them—it's amazing. I understand why you put so much time into it.'"

Karyn is on BGCS's board of directors, is secretary of the HR Committee and sits on the Strategic Planning Committee. Her volunteerism is "ingrained," she says. Her mom sat on the board of the Childcare Learning Center and volunteered at St. Luke's Parish in Darien. "She'd take her three towheaded girls down to the South End of Stamford to deliver Thanksgiving baskets to the tenement buildings." Karyn adds, "You get back a lot more than you give. I watch the kids grow and hear them speak and think, I helped make this kid feel this good about himself." »





BEST FRIEND *To Children*

{ JACK KELLEY }

In 2010 Jack Kelley, a writer, and his wife, Jacki, Global CEO of the media agency Universal McCann, decided to take their second grader, Ashley, to Kenya. There, they and other UM employees helped build a school with Free the Children (FTC), a Canadian-based charity. Jack says, "That trip changed our lives, especially Ashley's."

"We decided to do everything we could to introduce the charity into the United States and, particularly, New Canaan," says Jack, who moved here with his family from Northern Virginia in 2006. "We invited Craig Kielburger, the co-founder, to speak in town and soon after started the New Canaan High School FTC chapter." St. Luke's, Saxe Middle School, South Elementary (Ashley's school) and St. Ann School in Bridgeport followed. Three of those FTC clubs traveled overseas to build schools last summer, and a *60 Minutes*

crew filmed a segment with the St. Ann's group in Kenya.

"We invited other inspirational speakers to town, including Spencer West, who had his legs amputated as a child but climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro earlier this year. We held leadership seminars, volunteered at a soup kitchen, held food drives for local shelters, and took a group of thirty to 'We Day' in Toronto," says Jack. At these events (FTC will hold eight in Canada this school year), over 20,000 students pack into sports arenas, where role models from Al Gore to the Dalai Lama "encourage them to become 'shameless idealists.'"

Jack emphasizes that Ashley helped him set up FTC clubs (while Jacki pursued corporate sponsors). Kids play a key role in FTC; it's a student-driven charity. Jack, who has stepped back to a behind-the-scenes support role, knows this model works. "I started church youth groups when I was young," he says. "One grew from eight to 420 students in six months."

FTC has built 650 schools in forty-five countries, and ninety-one cents of every dollar raised goes to the cause. Thousands of kids have benefitted, including the volunteers. Jack describes what it was like for them building a school: "Some smiled, others cried and a few said they had never felt more alive as they did when watching or interacting with the Kenyan students attending classes in their new school for the first time."

FTC's Craig Kielburger comments, "Jack has stood out among our supporters as an individual who has gone above and beyond in creating environments in which young people feel safe, supported and encouraged to create a world that they can believe in."

Jack concludes, "I always tell people, 'Be naïve enough to change the world and you will.'"

MOST *Inspirational* ROLE MODEL

{ PAUL GREEN }

Paul Green lives with his wife, Eleanor, on Old Mill Beach in Westport, a place their twenty-two grandchildren like to visit in the summer. On a pleasant August morning, Paul might be found rowing up the Saugatuck River, as part of his daily hour to hour-and-a-half exercise regimen. After that, it's time for a Japanese lesson and then perhaps a ballroom dancing class. That's quite a schedule for any octogenarian, never mind an eighty-eight-year-old who has been living with Parkinson's disease for nearly fifteen years.

Paul was diagnosed with Parkinson's, a progressive and potentially debilitating disease, at the age of seventy-five. A Brown grad who served in the Navy in WWII, Paul wasn't about to sit around and wait for a cure. "It was a shocking diagnosis, but I decided to fight back," he explains. "I felt instinctively that if I could exercise and get the blood flow to the brain, I could slow the progression of the disease. At the time doctors didn't give much credence to exercise. It's different today."

For some doctors, it's different because they've seen what happened when Paul implemented an ambitious program of exercises that build flexibility, strength, balance and stamina, in addition to activities that challenge the mind. "Without my program, I might be in a wheelchair," says Paul. Instead, he's just competed in the USRowing Masters National Championship. He won a bronze medal but admits "there were only three boats in the eighty-and-above category." Recently he's decided to learn to play the piano. "I'm driving everyone in the house crazy," he says, chuckling.

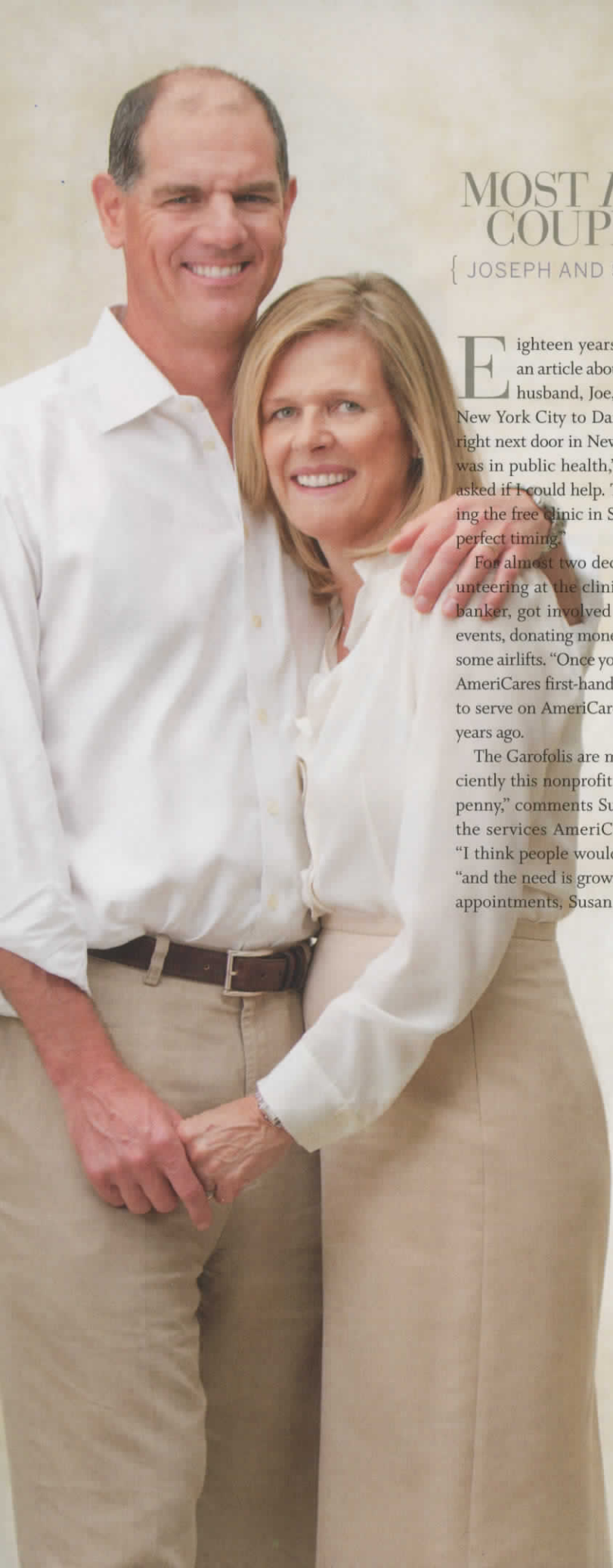
After a career publishing magazines designed to help developing nations, Paul wanted to share his approach for combating Parkinson's with the world. He set up his foundation, Nevah Surrendah, five years ago. "It's named after Winston Churchill, my hero," explains Paul. "He stood up against tremendous opposition, persevered and won."

To fight Parkinson's, Paul insists, "The No. 1

weapon is a positive attitude. It's absolutely essential. Roughly 50 percent of people with Parkinson's are depressed." Nevahsurrendah.com gives sufferers everywhere a place to find support. Locally, Paul facilitates a Parkinson's Disease support group at the Senior Center in Westport, where he organized an event with a Zumba instructor and reggae band. Paul raves, "We got people who hadn't moved in years up and dancing!"

Barbara Butler, the town of Westport's human services director, says, "Paul is extraordinary. He has shown Parkinson's sufferers a happier, more fulfilling way of living. With his optimistic spirit, Paul teaches us to accept that we may encounter illness as we grow older, but we can still live full lives." »





MOST *Involved* COUPLE

{ JOSEPH AND SUSAN GAROFOLI }

Eighteen years ago, Susan Garofoli read an article about AmeriCares. She and her husband, Joe, had recently moved from New York City to Darien, and AmeriCares was right next door in New Canaan. “My background was in public health,” says Susan. “I called and asked if I could help. They happened to be opening the free clinic in South Norwalk then. It was perfect timing.”

For almost two decades, Susan has been volunteering at the clinic; and Joe, an investment banker, got involved over the years, attending events, donating money and even riding along on some airlifts. “Once you do that, you’ve really seen AmeriCares first-hand,” says Joe, who was invited to serve on AmeriCares Leadership Council two years ago.

The Garofolis are motivated both by how efficiently this nonprofit runs—“they don’t waste a penny,” comments Susan—and by the need for the services AmeriCares provides, even here. “I think people would be shocked,” says Susan, “and the need is growing.” Before the clinic took appointments, Susan adds, “day laborers, some

who were incredibly sick, came to the clinic at 7 a.m. and waited for it to open at 1 p.m.”

Joe has visited AmeriCares’ office in Mumbai, and he and Susan have been to the free clinic and orphanages in El Salvador. “Without AmeriCares’ support, those kids would be living very distressed lives,” says Joe, who admits these stops are emotionally challenging. Susan interjects, “The children gain a lot of hope, though, just knowing someone cares.”

The Garofolis also visited a hospital AmeriCares supports in Guadalajara. “There were what seemed like hundreds of beds on each wing, just bed after bed,” describes Joe. “We’d walk by family members gathered around each bed, and they would smile and greet us. You feel like you are in their life for a moment.”

The couple’s charitable work extends beyond AmeriCares to World Vision (Susan is on the board of Women of Vision of Fairfield County), Habitat for Humanity, and mission trips for Darien Methodist Church, where Susan and Joe are Sunday school teachers. Their three children have been on mission trips from Appalachia to Nicaragua, and the family visited the child they sponsor in Delhi.

“The Garofolis go above and beyond to help people in need, whether they are halfway around the world or just around the corner,” comments Andrea Vakos, AmeriCares director of major gifts.

How do they find the time? “When you are committed, it just becomes part of your life,” says Susan. “You mark it on your calendar and you go and do it. I feel so lucky. I love what I do for the clinic. It truly has enriched my life.” »