

PHOENIX
Business Journal

Volunteerism

THE HEART OF BUSINESS AWARDS | 2008



JIM POULIN | PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL

Gretchen Jacobs was a part of a coalition that lobbied legislators to require insurance companies to cover autism treatment.

'I have only been effective because of others'

Lobbyist uses a lawyer's savvy, a mother's passion to help fund autism treatment

BY CANDACE HUGHES | Contributing Writer

While many of the nominees for the *Phoenix Business Journal* and Hands on Greater Phoenix's inaugural Heart of Business awards learn volunteer skills as part of their jobs, Gretchen Jacobs has donated her professional capabilities toward creating better services for her daughter and other children with autism.

"As a contract corporate lobbyist for the past 10 years, I have the benefit of familiarity with the Arizona Legislature and governor and know they are deeply committed to the people of our state," said Jacobs, chairwoman of law firm Greenberg Traurig LLP's government relations practice group.

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WINNER:
COMMUNITY
STEWARDSHIP

GRETCHEN JACOBS
FIRM: Greenberg Traurig LLP
CHARITY: Autism, Care and Treatment Today
WEB: www.act-today.org

Sponsored by:



STEWARDSHIP: Lobbyist, mother champions the needs of autistic children

FROM PAGE 29

"It was not until I had a child with autism that I learned how effective quality treatment can be, or how cost-prohibitive and unavailable it is," said Jacobs, whose daughter Ava is now 4 and attends Tempe Solel preschool with her younger sister, Kate.

At the age of 18 months, Ava lost her ability to speak, communicate and chew food, and Jacobs was stunned to learn that these changes were the onset of a regressive form of autism.

With early intervention, Ava, who once did not acknowledge her mother or the presence of others, now greets Jacobs with a hug and a smile.

GETTING FUNDS FROM THE LEGISLATURE

Jacobs used her lobbying experience to convince the state Legislature to fund an additional \$5 million for creation of model programs for autism treatment. In addition, she was part of a coalition that successfully lobbied legislators to require insurance companies to cover autism treatment.

Phil Calzadilla — regional manager of Cisco Systems Inc., a lobbying client of Jacobs' — nominated her for the award.

"These programs are currently in effect and are meeting the very high expectations envisioned," he said. "Gretchen's second major volunteer achievement came when she reached out to parents at autism support groups across the Valley and spearheaded an enormous grassroots coalition last legislative session."

Jacobs said Calzadilla has introduced her to individuals with the Cisco Edu-

cational Foundation and helped facilitate discussions within Cisco as to how the company's technology can help schools and families meet some of the challenges relating to autism.

Jacobs also founded and serves as chairwoman of the Arizona Chapter of Autism, Care and Treatment Today, a



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Gretchen Jacobs
Greenberg Traurig LLP

nonprofit group that pays for treatment and other unmet needs of children with autism.

"Though I am one of the lucky few who can afford and obtain treatment for my daughter, I am haunted by families who are not in the same position," Jacobs said. "I am grateful that lawmakers and others were as compassionate and forward-thinking as I thought they were."

Early, effective intervention is important, she emphasized. "(It) can mean the difference between a child learning to speak and becoming an independent, productive citizen, versus without quality treatment, that same child may require 'round-the-clock care for the rest of his or her life," she said.

"The reality that there is hope for families living with autism, but only if those families are wealthy enough to afford treatment, was not something I could sit with," Jacobs said.

BOOK EVENT SET FOR DECEMBER

Jacobs, who is 36, is organizing a Dec. 7 "Jingle Your Bells" book event at Gardener's Book Service. Barbara Park, author of the Junie B. Jones children's book series, will sign books purchased at the event. There will be crafts, songs, balloon animals, raffles and drawings, and all children at the event will receive a Secret Santa bag from Junie B. Jones, Jacobs said. More information is available at www.azactoday.org.

"I have only been effective because of others," Jacobs said. "The Legislature and governor have been steadfast in their commitment to making things better for families with children with autism."

"Similarly, but for the extensive grassroots coalition of 'autism moms' who worked tirelessly on the insurance legislation, it would not have passed. I am effective only because of the extraordinary people I have been lucky to work with," she said.

Community Stewardship finalists

BICH-NGOC TRAN, DDS

PRACTICE: Simply Dentistry

CHARITY: New Foundations Center

WEB: www.thenewfoundation.com

A daughter of Vietnamese refugees who immigrated to the U.S., Bich-Ngoc Tran identifies with the at-risk youth at the New Foundations Center.

Serving kids ages 11-17 who are in therapeutic programs for behavioral and mental health issues, substance abuse and addiction, depression and learning disabilities, Tran volunteers to provide dental services one Saturday a month at the Scottsdale facility.

She was nominated by a patient in her private dental practice, Chad Neubecker, a director with Wachovia Bank. He pointed out that she recently started Simply Dentistry, but still finds time to volunteer.

Tran was 7 when she immigrated to the U.S. to follow her mother, who fled South Vietnam several years after the fall of Saigon. Her mother was rescued by a German humanitarian ship and taken to Indonesia until her U.S. citizenship was granted. Tran's father later left Vietnam, and the family was reunited after a four-year separation.

"With these experiences, she is able to associate with at-risk children and is able to show that, despite challenges presented in their youth, they are able to overcome obstacles, become successful and to give back to their communities," Neubecker said.

— Candace Hughes



Tran

GRETCHEN HENSON, DDS

PRACTICE: General dentistry in Phoenix

CHARITY: Central Arizona Shelter Services

WEB: www.cass-az.org

While many people avoid the dentist, patients arriving at the Central Arizona Shelter Services Dental Clinic are eager to have their smiles restored by a gentle, caring professional. Volunteer dentist Gretchen Henson takes that responsibility seriously.

In addition to managing her private dental practice, Henson has been volunteering at the clinic two days a week since 2001, said Kris Volcheck, CASS dental director.

"Dr. Henson's leadership, clinical experience, practice management expertise and compassion for the homeless have contributed greatly to the clinic's capacity to deliver quality comprehensive dental care for some of the most vulnerable and needy individuals in our community," Volcheck said.

Women who have been subjected to domestic violence tend to prefer a female dentist, and Henson is especially good at fixing their smiles with a compassionate manner, Volcheck said.



Henson

A patient of Henson's named Denise wrote a letter to the clinic expressing satisfaction with her treatment — praise dentists aren't accustomed to receiving.

"Today I had an appointment at the dental clinic," she wrote. "I've been looking forward to it all week. Is that weird? To actually want to

go to the dentist? Because for me, to finally have the opportunity to have my teeth taken care of is a privilege."

Henson said her dental school at the University of Colorado instilled in students a sense of community and volunteerism. The first CASS clinic operated out of a small trailer and could take only one patient at a time, but the clinic evolved from extracting painful teeth to offering comprehensive dental care.

She noted that one of her recent patients was a young woman who had lost several teeth when her car was hit by an uninsured drunken driver. The patient underwent cosmetic dentistry procedures to help her get her mouth — and, by extension, her life — back on track.

— Candace Hughes