



# PFAR Pays It Forward

The Pasadena-Foothills Association of Realtors helps spread the wealth to those in need.

STORY BY // **CUYLER GIBBONS**

AS WITH ALMOST ALL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS, PFAR, ORIGINALLY FOUNDED AS THE PASADENA REALTY BOARD IN 1907, IS CONCERNED WITH HELPING ITS MEMBERS CONDUCT RESPONSIBLE AND SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES, WHILE PROVIDING GOVERNMENTAL ADVOCACY ON THE ISSUES OF THE DAY. ALSO AMONG THE OBJECTIVES CONTAINED IN PFAR'S LOFTY MISSION STATEMENT IS THE

"advocacy of community service." More than just advocacy however, PFAR, through its Charitable Foundation, and the community fundraising events that support it, provides the

direct means for its members to participate in giving back and for creating opportunities for others to do so as well.

Each year, PFAR conducts four events to

**LIGHT IT UP BLUE.** Villa Esperanza kicks off autism awareness month.

raise money that is then awarded as individual scholarships and as grants to various 501(c)(3) charities selected by the Foundation Committee. Last year, the Foundation raised over \$100,000. About 40 percent comes from the annual Wreath Auction, with a bingo night, wine tasting and the popular Taste of Old Pasadena combining to provide the balance of the funding.

According to Matt McIntyre of Berkshire Hathaway and the 2016 Chairman of the PFAR Charitable Foundation, scholarships are the "foundation of the Foundation." PFAR awards annual \$1,000 dollar scholarships to one (or sometimes two) students from each of Pasadena and the San Gabriel Valley's public high schools. Lynnell Woodward and Ruth McNevin and a team of readers manage the applications, applications that, as McIntyre says "can be quite emotionally taxing. I'm always amazed at how heavy some of them can be." This year, the committee reviewed 56 applications for the scholarships ultimately awarded to 10 highly deserving Pasadena and SGV high school students.

While PFAR's efforts began with the scholarships, over time it became apparent they were able to generate more and more funds and sought to spread the largesse more widely throughout the community, and now the Foundation takes applications and awards grants to a variety of charitable organizations. As McIntyre says, "We've been doing these events for about 25 years, the Foundation, being a 501(c)(3) has been around about 10 years. Prior to that we just sort of collected funds and distributed them! We had to make a structural change. Twenty grand is one thing, but now we are hovering around a hundred thousand dollars annually."

As McIntyre explains, the Foundation Board, which is "a branch of PFAR but completely independent of the main board," solicits grant applications and votes on an annual basis. "We cast a wide net," he says. "It's kind of an open call on grant applications, but there are caveats. The organization must be a 501(c)(3), and it must be strictly local, not part of a national organization." Like the local chapter of the Red Cross for instance. "I think the Red Cross does a hell of a lot of good work, but they are nationally funded, and we look for things

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**HAPPY CAMPERS.** Villa students at Camp Esperanza



that have a more grass roots relationship to our service area," he says. Though not part of the official regulations, McIntyre also offered that the Foundation "shies away from religious or culturally oriented organizations" when it comes to approving grant applications, in the interest of ensuring PFAR support recipients are as all inclusive as possible.

How are the hard choices ultimately made, I wonder? "We solicit grant applications like most foundations would do then...we duke it out!" he says, indicating that, despite the ample funds, there is always more need than resources and hard choices must indeed be made. Often, he says, "It's based on a historical relationship. We have partners we've supported for years and there are members of the Foundation with long ties that feel deeply about the services those entities provide."

One such long term partner is Villa Esperanza, a 55-year-old organization originally begun by a group of parents looking to educate, rather than institutionalize, their special needs children. From a single small school in Pasadena, Villa Esperanza has grown to include a speech and language center, an occupational therapy clinic, and adult residential programs and employment services. As Gioia Pastre, Vice President of Development and Public Relations for Villa Esperanza says, "Today, we serve kids, adults and seniors, 2 years old to 92."

Villa Esperanza has been receiving support from PFAR since 2009 (upwards of \$70,000, according to McIntyre), most of which has gone to support the Speech and Language Center, where highly trained speech therapists currently serve about 100 children. "It's pretty amazing," says Pastre, "especially since it's a group of realtors who already have full time jobs. Yet they choose to give back to the community. We've been very fortunate to have their support. It's a wonderful, energetic group of very caring people."

When it comes to offering their support, the PFAR Charitable Foundation is always interested in promoting results, even when they arise from less traditional sources. McIntyre cites MACH 1 as one of his favorite

examples in this regard. An acronym for "Move A Child Higher," MACH 1 has for 20 years been helping people with physical disabilities gain confidence, strength and well-being through the use of "equine assisted therapy."

MACH 1 Founder and Executive Director Joy Rittenhouse was stricken with polio at eight years of age. Then 30 years ago, she was introduced to horseback riding while on vacation. It became her passion and eventually she discovered therapeutic riding and began studying therapeutic riding techniques and horsemanship in earnest, earning an instructor's certification from the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International.

To share the tremendous personal success Joy found in equine therapy with other people with disabilities, she founded Move A Child Higher, and, for the last 20 years has been helping people grow beyond what they thought possible. For the last five of those years, PFAR has, Rittenhouse says, "not only [supported our operations] but helped us to grow." Before PFAR, MACH 1 was in a rented facility, and now operates in a new center, on land donated by the city, and with more horses and the possibility of doubling the student base next year, including wounded veterans that will be coming into the program. "We are very grateful for the support and kindness of PFAR," says Rittenhouse.

Many other recipients of PFAR's good works no doubt stand ready to echo the sentiments of MACH 1 and Villa Esperanza. As long as Pasadena and the San Gabriel Valley continues to support a group of realtors of such admirable conscience, the roles of the grateful will only continue to grow. @