

The Boston Globe

SHARING HER SUCCESS

MILLIONAIRE TURNS TO PHILANTHROPY

Phil Santoro, Globe Correspondent
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Like most kids living in the Somerville housing projects, Elizabeth Weber wanted out. She had no game plan, no clue how to even get started. Like most people, she had no idea what she wanted to be when she grew up. "All I knew was I wanted to be a millionaire," she said.

When you realize your life's dream at the age of 44, what do you do next? "You give it all back," said Weber, who today is indeed a millionaire. "Or at least a lot of it." And so she has.

On one of the biggest nights of her life, celebrating her 20th wedding anniversary in the Hub's Bay Tower Room with some 100 of her friends, several of whom she had put on their own fast track to wealth, Weber announced the formation of an organization that defined what she had become - a philanthropist.

It was that night, 16 months ago, that the Melrose-based Weber Foundation of Helping Hands began its work to raise money for people who need it a lot more than she does. To date, the foundation has raised more than \$100,000 and given all of it to 18 people, most of them New Englanders, who have life-threatening illnesses or other catastrophic situations.

Among the recipients are Kelly Conlon, a Stoneham High School student who needs a double lung transplant; the families of Ed and Carol Conley of Wilmington and Joseph Phillion of Melrose, whose homes were destroyed by fires; and 3-year-old Bobby Terri of Norwood and Kimberly Mackay of Winthrop, who have brain tumors. The organization's first recipient was 3-year-old Robbie Sorrentino of Burlington, who died last year after battling leukemia.

"Ms. Weber is a genuinely nice person. and she's got a lot of great ideas," said Conlon, who since she was a small child has suffered from primary pulmonary hypertension. Now a 15-year-old sophomore, Conlon tries to keep up with her school work by using a computer from home when she's not in school two days a week. "The foundation is great because it's not just meant to help with one thing; it's pretty much able to help anyone who needs them. I think it's great that [the foundation] is willing to do stuff for lots of other people and not just focus on one thing, because there are so many things that can happen and can get forgotten."

In a letter sent to Weber shortly after her son died, Terry Sorrentino wrote: "We are so grateful for the help you gave to us and our son. You are truly amazing and really make a difference in people's lives. Families that are sick or in trouble are so very lucky to have the help from the Foundation." So far, she said, Helping Hands has been able to give away nearly every dime of the funds it has raised because all of the administrative expenses, which are considerable, have been donated by generous friends and suppliers or paid for by Weber. Those include legal work, printing, photography, and the daily efforts of a team of volunteers.

The foundation plans two major fund-raising events each year. The big one is a spring ball, which this year will be held April 6 at the Fairmount Copley Plaza in Boston. Weber's sphere of influence is evident in the items that have been donated for the ball's silent auction: helicopter rides, framed art, diamond bracelets,

golf at the Newport Country Club, and vacations on Block Island and in Puerto Vallarta. It's all pretty heady stuff for Weber, a mother of two children who has not yet completed her bachelor of arts degree. But, in the past two decades, Weber has gone from selling brushes door-to-door to becoming international field president for Market America, earning more than seven figures a year.

After graduating from Somerville High School in 1975, Weber pursued a business administration degree, first at Massachusetts Bay Community College, then at Suffolk University, Bentley College, and Northeastern University. "I was so close to finishing," Weber said. "But I wasn't cut out for the classroom."

So she left school and went to work as a secretary for the Boston law firm of Reed, McCarthy, and Mulligan, leaving seven years later with Joe Mulligan when he became general counsel for the City of Boston. Weber managed to hang in there for 10 years before stagnation set in. "I was always looking to get ahead, and I knew I had to try something," she said.

She tried a lot of things - most of them ventures in distributed sales programs. "I tried everything - brushes, jewelry, skin care - you name it. I made some money, but it wasn't worth the hours I was putting in. I wanted to make it big, and I wasn't getting to the six figures I wanted to make. I was with nine different direct-selling companies in 11 years. My husband Bruce and I were living paycheck to paycheck. It was so hard. I was ready to give up."

That's when a friend asked her to check out a new company called Market America, which used a different approach from the other companies she had tried. "Bruce and I promised each other we wouldn't try another thing," she said. "I was only going to evaluate it. When I did, I realized how radically different it was from anything else I tried. I'd been in this long enough to know."

Within a year, she had reached her goal of a six-figure salary, and within two years, Weber was making \$8,300 a week, recruiting teams of distributors who were selling a wide variety of products, including house alarms, water filters, and nutritional supplements. Four years later she earned her first \$1 million.

According to friends and family, it all makes sense when you understand her personality. "Betty is the most driven person I know," said longtime friend Connie Spellman of Stoneham. "She's a real Type-A, a real go-getter. When she sets her mind to something, it gets done. And that's it."

"That's true" Weber admitted. "I love a challenge. I have always been determined to be successful, somehow. There's been a lot of hard work and a lot of good fortune, too. I have a wonderful family who has been so supportive over the years, especially during the tough times when you need them the most. And I have met an awful lot of very good people who want me to succeed. That's been the key for me - the people who have been there for me. So, now it's my turn to give."

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PHILANTHROPY MAGAZINE

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WOMEN PHILANTHROPISTS RAMPING UP

Kae Dakin, president of Washington Grantmakers, an organization of 140 capital-area philanthropic groups, tells the Washington Post, "There is an enormous amount of untapped potential" among affluent women. Dakin says women are traditionally more comfortable with volunteering time than with giving money. Lin Macmaster, who has studied wealthy women's attitudes, agrees: "Women don't look at themselves as philanthropists." Ami Aronson, head of Washington's Bernstein Family Foundation, says "old-school women philanthropists are of a mind-set of being private, of trying to downplay their economic viability and success" or their inherited wealth. One survey found that affluent

women "needed more money than men did to feel financially secure about their futures." But women's philanthropy is increasing; women's foundations that raise money "primarily for programs that benefit women and children" have risen in number from five to 95 in the past 20 years. Nor are women philanthropists limited only to "women's issues" in their work. For example, the Boston Globe tells of **Elizabeth Weber**, who grew up in the Somerville housing projects of Boston, yearning to get out. "All I knew was I wanted to be a millionaire," she says. At 44, she'd reached her goal, going "from selling brushes door-to-door to becoming international field president for Market America, earning more than seven figures a year." What's next? "You give it all back, or at least a lot of it." At her twentieth wedding anniversary a year and a half ago, Weber announced the formation of **The Weber Foundation of Helping Hands**, which has given more than \$100,000 to people with "life-threatening illnesses or other catastrophic situations." They give away "nearly every dime" received because "all of the administrative expenses, which are considerable, have been donated by friends and suppliers or paid for by Weber."

Networking Times

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Elizabeth Weber: You Just Have to Give

John David Mann

Super-successful networker Elizabeth Weber wasn't satisfied giving money to foundations and never seeing the results-so she started her own (very hands-on) charity: The Weber Foundation of Helping Hands.

Life wasn't easy growing up in the Cambridge projects, then in Somerville; I saw some pretty tough conditions."

Elizabeth Weber remembers what it was like to struggle against the odds and feel like they were stacked against her. She also remembers those rays of hope brought by people she now refers to as "guardian angels."

"I'll never forget certain people who stepped into our lives to help us out at times. My nana, for example. She was not as poor as my parents: she had a little pool she'd take us to on weekends. We thought she was fabulously wealthy!

"I knew, way back then, that I wanted to be successful and I told myself that if I ever did, I would help other people who could not help themselves."

Elizabeth never lost the thread of that thought, though it would take years to pick it back up and fully realize it. The next few decades were all about the pragmatic business of raising a family and financial survival.



Fresh out of Somerville High School, Elizabeth entered a degree program in business administration but never quite finished it. She got as far as an Associate Degree in Secretarial Science. "I just wasn't cut out for the classroom," she confesses. She was so close to finishing her BA in Business while working as a secretary for a Boston law firm, a career that lasted 18 years, but never completed her degree. During that time, Elizabeth and her husband Bruce also gave direct sales a try more precisely, nine tries. In the early 80's, they tried building in a network marketing company that has since become huge, but to no avail.

"I couldn't even hit the first achievement level!, exclaims Elizabeth. I worked hard in a number of different networking companies, but I could never seem to earn much more than \$1000 a month. It just never clicked..."

...And Then, It Clicked

Ten years ago, a friend asked Elizabeth to evaluate a new networking company that had just recently launched. The more she looked at it, the more excited she grew and the more nervous Bruce got. At this point in their marriage, Elizabeth was the breadwinner, while Bruce was home taking care of the kids, along with a little construction work here and there. The two had vowed they would never take a shot at a sales opportunity again; when she announced that she was going to pay the company a visit "just to evaluate it" for her friend Bruce was less than pleased.

"I wasn't even considering it for myself," Elizabeth insists; "but the truth is, I guess I knew even then, deep down in my heart, that if I ever found the right vehicle, I would make it big. I'm a hard worker, and I love to help people."

For Elizabeth, it was also a matter of timing: she was truly tired of her job, which she saw as a dead-end position that wasn't going anywhere. "There comes a point in your life," she says, "where you realize that unless you do something, everything's just going to stay the same forever."

She flew out to look at the company; when Bruce met her at the airport, she said, "Honey, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, we're going to be rich. The bad news is, I'm quitting my job you'll have to go get one to support me." She gave notice that Monday: her nearly two decades as a legal secretary were over.

"Everybody thought I was nuts, but something inside me said, 'This is going to be huge, go for it.'" And go for it she did with a vengeance.

Success At Last

"I put my back against the wall, worked 80-hour weeks, and moved a lot of product. Bruce was wonderful: he stayed home and watched the kids while I did the business. (Bruce Adam and Ashley were nine and six at the time; today Ashley is 16 and Bruce Adam is in college.)

"Within 90 days of starting I knew this was going to work; after four months, I was earning six figures. I earned over \$150,000 that year; by year five I was earning over a million annually and it has increased every year since."

Even after a decade in the business and a huge organization that is the classic residual dream come true, Elizabeth works hard for her network and continues sponsoring new people into the business at an average of at least one a month. "I love it; I'm passionate about it; I'll never stop. I'm sponsoring two people tomorrow. I mean, I keep it sane I don't put in the same hours I did in the beginning. But I put in a good eight to 12 hours a week."

Why is she still at it?, we ask. She answers without hesitation: "My goal is to get everyone earning money. If I can affect one more life, it's worth it." As her business grew, Elizabeth soon found a powerful avenue for realizing her childhood "guardian angel" dream and a way to affect many more lives.

Helping People Who Can't Help Themselves

Through her networking business, Elizabeth had found a way to help people help themselves; but she wasn't satisfied. "I wanted more. I wanted to be able to help people who cannot help themselves."

From early in her business, Elizabeth had habitually given ten percent of her income to charity; even in the early days when the income was modest, she always gave away that ten percent. As her income increased, so did the ten percent.

"Pretty soon I was giving away a really large amount of money and I began to realize that I didn't really know where it was going." The secretary-turned-entrepreneur had helped put on some large fund-raisers for various charities, such as Children's Wish Foundation and the American Cancer Society; she co-founded the Bike for Life in 1997. But she gradually began to realize just how much of the money they were raising was siphoned off for administration and other costs.

"In some charities, I've heard only ten percent of the money actually gets through!," she exclaims. "It upset me terribly. I wanted to put a face to the money I was giving away; I wanted to see it working. That's when I realized I wanted to start my own foundation. But how?" The answer would not be long in coming. Says long-time friend Connie Spellman, Betty is the most driven person I know; she's a real go-getter. When she sets her mind to something, it gets done. Nothing demonstrates that portrait more vividly than the genesis of The Weber Foundation of Helping Hands (www.theweberfoundation.com). I could never have accomplished all this without my success in network marketing. This would have been tough to pull off on a secretary's salary!

Founding a Foundation

For the couple's 20th wedding anniversary in 2000, Bruce and Elizabeth had decided to invite 200 friends, hold a huge ceremony and renew their vows. After they sent out the invitations, their friends began to call, asking what they could get the couple as gifts.

"I kept saying, 'Don't get us anything, I don't want anything just come!'" laughs Elizabeth. But to no avail: friends are friends, and an anniversary is an anniversary: "They said, 'Listen, we're going to get you something anyway so just tell us what.' I thought, what on earth can I ask for from my friends?" Then inspiration struck.

Elizabeth and Bruce had heard about the plight of a local boy, Robbie Sorrentino. Robbie was suffering from leukemia; in addition to the physical and emotional ravages, the disease was devastating little Robbie's family financially. "I thought, Hey, instead of having people give us gifts, we could have them give contributions the money can go to Robbie. I could start my foundation!"

Elizabeth worked fast. The Weber Foundation of Helping Hands was officially established on October 4; the couple's friends were all asked to give contributions in lieu of gifts. Four days later, they were celebrating their anniversary, renewing their vows and announcing the birth of their philanthropic venture.

"The event was so huge, the Boston Globe did a big write-up on it. People in Boston were trying to figure out why there was a huge fireworks display going off over Boston Harbor in the middle of October!--we used the same company that does the Fourth of July in the City of Boston every year."

Since that eventful October nearly two years ago, the Weber Foundation raised more than \$100,000 its first year and gave it away to 18 individuals and families in need, most of them New Englanders, who have found themselves in the grip of life-threatening illnesses or other catastrophic situations. And the total percentage of that money that goes to administration? Zero.

"All administration is either donated, or I pay for it so that the money that is contributed goes directly to the people who need it," says Elizabeth proudly.

This spring, the Foundation held their first annual Spring Ball; over 350 people attended; they raised over \$75,000 and gave out \$30,000 in grants that same night. "We gave out \$10,000 to a young woman who needed a double lung; \$6000 to a little boy with a rare disorder, who doesn't even have a home; \$6000 to a family who can't get insurance money to pay for treatments for their son who is dying from a brain tumor; another \$6500 to a woman with Lou Gehrig's Disease all she wants to do is spend one summer with her two daughters before she goes into a nursing home." And \$1600 to Dana Farber Cancer Institute to help a single mom with a 4-year-old child stricken with cancer rent an apartment for her and her four children. In total, the foundation to date has raised over \$175,000 and given 29 grants to people in dire need.

The range and diversity is typical: one of Elizabeth's goals was to create a foundation that would not be defined or limited by a particular cause or illness.

"Most of the existing foundations and charities are extremely specific, explains Elizabeth; we wanted to help the people who fall through the cracks, who don't fit the definitions."

For example, Elizabeth tells about how she just got a letter from the grandparents of a little boy who is sick. The elderly couple had written to twelve different foundations and not gotten even a response from a single one. Finally, they'd written to Elizabeth: they wrote to her on a Thursday and had their grant that Saturday.

The Need to Give

Elizabeth stands back and reflects on the last two years' experience.

"In a way, it's just as rewarding seeing the impact on the people who give the money, and on those who help in the operation. It's not just about helping those who are in such dire need. It's also about opening people's minds: people who aren't in such dire need to receive, but are in just as much need only their need is to give. You help people realize that there are all these less fortunate people out there who are in need and that it doesn't take that much to help them."

Do people look at her, we ask, and say, Well, sure Elizabeth has the time and money to give away: she's pulling in over a million a year!

"Sometimes, yes, I think so. It's true, I could never have accomplished all this without my success in network marketing. This would have been tough to pull off on a secretary's salary! And even more than the money, it's the time. The Foundation work is incredibly time-consuming; I work at it constantly, Requests for grants come in every week. People can only volunteer so much of their time; I make up the difference. "At the same time, people who think they don't have it to give are the ones who need to give it the most! It doesn't matter how much you give; what's important is just to give. When you give, you are saying thank you for what you already have, and you open yourself up to having a more rewarding and fulfilling life."

John David Mann is Editor of Networking Times.

Weber makes everyday Christmas with charitable foundation

By David Mancuso / MELROSE@CNC.COM Tuesday, December 24, 2002

It's about this time each year that millions of Americans -- surrounded by throngs of fellow shoppers, inundated by invitations to one celebration after the next, challenged to find the perfect gift for every soul we know - often pause, if only for the briefest of moments, in an attempt to resurrect the true spirit of the season. Yes, that little bell ringing in one's head this time of year is more than the Salvation Army's Santa, it's the conscience reminding all to take stock of their good fortune.

The holidays are a seasonal, social reminder that it is better to give than to receive and to remember that, no matter what our individual circumstances, it's likely that others are less fortunate.

This is particularly important this year, with the downturn in the economy. According to Leo P. Arnault, chair of the AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy, a nation-wide organization that surveys charitable giving in the U.S., "Research shows that giving is closely tied to the economy...In six of the eight recession years since 1971, charitable giving dropped by 1 to 5 percent."

Elizabeth Weber is one Melrosian who needs no seasonal reminder to give all she can to all who need. Weber, a 23-year Melrose resident, is the Founder and President of the Weber Foundation of Helping Hands, a Melrose-based, non-profit public charity dedicated to helping individuals and families in dire need due to life-threatening illness or other catastrophic situations.

Weber lives in Melrose with her husband, Bruce, and two children Bruce Adam, 19, now at college and Ashley, 16, a Melrose High School student.

Like many charities the season of giving for the Weber Foundation of Helping Hands, goes on 365 days a year.

What makes The Weber Foundation unique is to *whom* they give.

Unlike many of the charities currently appealing to the holiday spirit, The Weber Foundation specifically targets "those who have fallen through the cracks," in the words of Weber. "We focus on giving grants to people who have nowhere else to go," she said.

To date, the two-year-old foundation has given out more than 41 grants worth in excess of \$210,000 to people whose needs have ranged from organ transplants to support after losing everything in a fire. Weber points out that is important to remember that even the largest charities do not always cover all the costs related to life-altering tragedy. According to Weber, "People seldom think about the other costs that can be related to and illness."

Occasionally the Weber Foundation will team up with larger charities such as the Dana Farber Cancer Institute to help people cover expenses not addressed by the limitations of the other charity's mandate or regulations.

Unlike St. Nick, The Weber Foundation does not make a "Good" and "Bad" list. "So far we have been able to fulfill every single request that we have received, that falls within our guidelines," said Weber, as confident as St. Nick about to start his journey to deliver toys to every child at all points on the globe.



Elizabeth Weber, of Melrose, through her city-based charitable foundation has awarded over \$210,000 in grants to families in need for many reasons. Her foundation often teams with other charities, like the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, to identify those in need. (Courtesy photo)

To Weber, who started the foundation, as a way to give thanks for her own prosperity the idea of giving is personal. "This is my passion, I will do this the rest of my life," she said. "It is incredible to know that we have the ability to change lives."

Regardless of stretched credit-card limits or full calendars, Weber is quick to point out giving can take many forms at this, or anytime, of the year. "Everyone has something to give - time, talent - even those who may not feel they have everything they need," she added as a gentle reminder for everyone to ask the question, "How much is enough?"

As Weber suggests, foundations and charities like Weber's can always use volunteers as well as donations of cash or services. As the line from the holiday classic *It's a Wonderful Life* says, "One man's life touches so many others, when he's not there it leaves an awfully big hole."

Although based in Melrose, and despite having held a significant fundraiser at Mount Hood Golf Course, less than one-fifth of the Weber Foundation's volunteers come from within the city and Weber would like to see that change. "We would love to have more participation come from within the community," Weber said. And, there are many ways to do so. "We are beginning to plan our Spring Ball Event, and could use all the help we can get."

For more information on the Weber Foundation of Helping Hands, how to donate, volunteer or to learn more about the requirements to qualify for a grant, check out the Foundation's Web site at: www.theweberfoundation.com or call the organization directly at 781-662-1314.

To donate Make checks payable to: The Weber Foundation of Helping Hands, P.O. Box 863 Melrose, MA 02176

Note: The foundation thanks the Melrose Free Press for their coverage of our activities. However, please note that the article incorrectly states the total grants given to date as \$210,000.00. The correct amount is \$125,820 and the total grants given to date is 40.

Weber Foundation offers timely help in a kind manner

By Morissa Williams / Correspondent

Wednesday, February 19, 2003

Sometimes, when trouble seems to have you cast you into deep waters far from shore, you need a guardian angel to help you.

The Weber Foundation of Helping Hands, a charity in Melrose, Massachusetts, might be the one to provide that help.

The foundation is "a non-profit public charity with a mission statement to help individuals and families in dire need due to life-threatening illness or other catastrophic situations," according to a description on the foundation's Web site, <http://www.theweberfoundation.com>.

The group raises considerable funds, uses only volunteer labor, and gives all of its money directly to needy recipients. It learns about potential recipients through "guardian angels" who approach the foundation to ask it to help people they know in dire need. Anyone can be a guardian angel. If the foundation approves the grant, it is provided directly to the recipients. There is no red tape, and there are no administrative costs.

No red tape, and no administrative costs? How is that possible?

Elizabeth Weber has the personal resources, and the commitment, to provide for the basic needs of the foundation. She also a remarkable gift for bringing forth volunteer labor and generous donations from those she meets.

Diane DeSimone, of Pondview Florist of Winchester, for example, is one of the dedicated volunteers who helps with the foundation fundraisers. DeSimone is a gentle person with a love of beauty, and community, and as a volunteer she combines these passions. On April 5, for example, she will be helping to provide the flowers and decorations for the annual fund-raising ball at the Fairmount Copley Plaza of Boston.

"Diane DeSimone is a wonderful volunteer," exclaimed Weber in a recent interview. "She is always there for us not matter what - willing and able to do whatever you need...She is just a great person and we love her work."

Who are the recipients of this foundation?

Most recipients are families struggling with the endlessly mounting costs and demands of catastrophic illness. These are ordinary people whose insurance may only cover a fraction of real costs of illness. Recipients have been families with children or adults suffering from diseases such as cancer, cystic fibrosis, Lou Gehrig's disease, and other debilitating illnesses. The foundation has also come through for families whose lives were devastated by fire.

The stories of recipients' struggles are wrenching, such as the single mother of three children, two of whom have a rare neuromuscular disease called Spinal Muscular Atrophy. The children have been undergoing surgeries and need wheelchairs. The Weber foundation will help the mother catch up with mortgage and van payments so that she can care for her children at home.

The foundation puts the stories of every recipient on the Web site. Seeing the faces and reading the stories of recipients and guardian angels is a powerful experience.

Recently, the Weber Foundation issued a grant for \$5,400 to six families in Dorchester whose multi-unit apartment building burned down in January. Boston Mayor Tom Menino arranged for two weeks shelter for the families at a Charleston Inn, and the foundation grant extended that stay for an additional month to allow the families more time to find permanent housing.

What inspired Elizabeth Weber to create this foundation? Did she ever have a guardian angel herself?

"My nana was our Guardian Angel," said Weber. "We didn't have much growing up and she used to be there for our family whenever we needed anything. I always wanted to be able to give back to people less fortunate because I know the impact someone can make no matter how big or small. I was motivated - it was a goal of mine when I started to become very successful in my business. I wanted to give back. I started the foundation sooner than planned because of a little boy who was suffering with Leukemia and needed monies for experimental treatments that the insurance wouldn't cover."

Weber had considerable experience fundraising for other organizations, but she wasn't satisfied. She wanted to know exactly where donated resources go.

"I originally started a "Bike for Life" in 1996 where we would give money to large charities such as The Children's Wish Foundation, the American Cancer Foundation," she said. "This was great but I wanted to know where the money was going and who it was going to - I wanted to put a face and smile to every request granted - I wanted to be more personally involved. I also wanted to start a foundation where all administration is donated. I wanted to know the money was going to people in dire need. To date, I am proud to say that all administrative costs are donated."

"We act on requests right away," Weber noted. "I have a board that screens them, sends out a form for additional information, the board meets once a month and we vote on them. If it's something that needs our immediate attention we'll meet on it right away."

To become a volunteer, attend the April 5 fund-raising ball at the Copley, donate to the foundation, or learn how to request help for someone, call the Weber foundation at 781-662-1314, or visit the Web site, <http://theweberfoundation.com>.