

## **Weber Foundation offers timely help in a kind manner**

*By Morissa Williams / Correspondent*

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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>.