

A Winning Way with Charity

BY WENDY SWEET • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM SPITZ

Tucson is filled with volunteers who give gladly to help non-profit organizations. Their financial contributions, expertise and hours of dedicated volunteerism improve the quality of life in our community. On Tuesday, Nov. 10, five outstanding individuals and organizations will be honored by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Southern Arizona Chapter, at the 21st annual National Philanthropy Day luncheon. The event at The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa recognizes achievement by individual and corporate/foundation philanthropists; fundraising volunteers; youth volunteers; and professional fundraisers. They are nominated by the community and selected by a committee of Southern Arizona civic leaders. What follows are profiles of the award winners.

The Centurions

Outstanding Volunteer Fundraiser

The Centurions are an associate support group of Carondelet St. Mary's Hospital. The organization was formed in 1968 to provide funds for selected projects at St. Mary's, the oldest hospital in Southern Arizona and part of Carondelet Health Network, a not-for-profit group of hospitals. The Centurions work in conjunction with Carondelet Foundation, the fundraising arm for Carondelet Health Network. The group's sole purpose is to raise money to benefit St. Mary's Hospital via a very popular, annual themed event. To learn more, go to www.thecenturions.com.

(The answers to our questions come from Michael Osborne, Centurion president and Larry Stern, Centurion liaison.)

What does the name Centurions stand for?

The name has a two-fold meaning:

1) It honors more than one hundred years of service given to Southern Arizona by Carondelet St. Mary's Hospital.

2) The name reflects the members' business and civic leadership in the community by the historical reference to the Roman Centurion (a soldier leader of 100 men).

Who makes up the membership of the Centurions?

The members are individuals who have distinguished themselves and/or their firms in business and civic life. Prospective members must be sponsored by a member in good standing, and their application must be approved by the Membership Committee and the Board of Directors. There is a five percent limit on members from any one occupation (such as bankers, doctors, etc.). We have 100 active members and 102 life/senior members.

What do you do to raise money?

The Centurions have the largest individual fundraising event, in terms of attendance, of any non-profit organization in Tucson. It is held annually in the spring and is traditionally attended by more than 6,000 people. Each year's event is a theme party with cocktails, dinner and dancing.

Some of the past events include:

- 1979 The Great M.A.S.H. Bash at Pima Air Museum
- 1985 The Great Funny Paper Caper at Hi Corbett
- 1999 Rock at Woodstock at Tucson Electric Park
- 2009 "It's Centurion Saturday Night! No More Blues, Brother" at Tucson Electric Park.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Mike Furrier, v.p./ Event Chair 2009; Chip Yetzer, 2010 Event Chairman; Michael Osborne, President; Stan Spackeen, 2011 Event Chairman.

How do you go about putting on a party of that magnitude?

Work on each year's fundraiser begins in November, with the Event Chairmen brainstorming with fellow Centurions to decide on a theme. The committee meets monthly from January to May, coordinating different aspects. All 100 active members, along with the support of life/senior members, take part. The actual setup begins three days prior, with teardown the day after. Costs run more than \$200,000.

How much money have you donated?

In the early years, we started with an annual contribution of \$3500. We now give Carondelet St. Mary's Hospital \$400,000 per year. Since our inception we have given \$5,025,357."

Why are the Centurions so successful at raising large amounts of money?

The camaraderie of the men and the long-

term association of the members plays a big role. We also have a very faithful following in the community. Finally, we provide one of the best events in Tucson; it's a great value for a Saturday night.

What would you like the community to know about the Centurions?

We initially raised money for the burn unit at St. Mary's, but through the years, we also have raised money for the Hospice program, Outpatient Rehab, the Urgent Care Center, diabetes outreach and the Emergency Department. Our current goal — through 2012 — is enhancing the patient and family experience at St. Mary's.

What does this award mean to you?

We're very excited about being blessed with this honor. It means a lot to all our members to be recognized for our efforts. ▶