

# Helping to Shape Community Life

BY WENDY SWEET • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM SPITZ

**T**ucson 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 Friday, Nov. 19, five outstanding individuals and organizations will be honored by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Southern Arizona Chapter, at the 22nd 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 a professional fundraiser. Our interviews with the 2010 honorees appear on the following pages.

## Outstanding Philanthropist: Dorothy Vanek

**Current Volunteer Activities:** Epsilon Sigma Alpha philanthropic sorority; P.E.O. (educational sorority); American Red Cross; Interfaith Community Services; Tucson Symphony Orchestra; Oro Valley Community Foundation; Southern Arizona Symphony Orchestra; Tucson Chamber Artists; Splendido scholarship committee

**Family:** Husband Robert (passed away in 2001), daughter Deborah (passed away 2000), daughter Nancy (passed away 2009), two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren

**Education:** Awarded honorary Doctorate of Performing Arts degree from College of the Ozarks in 2010

**Awards:** ICS Director's Award for Exceptional Support (2008); AFP Spirit of Philanthropy Award (2007); Splendido Award of Appreciation; and Cottey College Stockard Society Award, to name just a few

**Favorite Book:** Loves mysteries, especially those by Sue Grafton

**Fun Fact:** She is skilled at petit point (a type of needlework design) and has quite a collection of stuffed animals, especially teddy bears.

Dorothy Vanek moved 28 times before settling in the Tucson area in 1983. "My husband Bob (who worked for Pan American World Airways for more than 30 years) would come home on a Friday and tell me he was being transferred," she remembers. "We have lived all over the world." As part of Bob's job, he dealt with six different United States

Presidents. "He was with President Kennedy just a week before Kennedy was assassinated," she notes.

Upon arriving in a new town, Dorothy would do two things: find a church and find a volunteer activity. "Bob didn't want me tied down to a job so that I could be there when our daughters got home from school," she recalls. Serving as a volunteer allowed her to become involved in her community and still be a stay-at-home mom. For example, when the girls were eight and nine, the family was living on Guam, where Bob was "on loan" to the Navy. "I went to the Red Cross to offer my services. They wanted me to push a cart, but I ended up volunteering five days a week assisting an oral surgeon."

Once they moved to the Tucson area, the Vaneks became involved with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra. After Bob passed away in 2001, Dorothy began volunteering in earnest. "I knew I had to get busy and not sit around feeling sorry for myself. I made new friends and got involved," she says. Vanek now lives at Splendido at Rancho Vistoso, where she has helped shape community life.

### When did you first start being a "giver," and who taught you about philanthropy?

"The one person who always instilled philanthropy in me was my mother. For example, when I was in high school, she taught me how to knit so I could knit sweaters for Polish children affected by WWII. I also learned quite a bit from William Danforth, the founder of Ralston Purina (my grandfather, an inventor,

had worked for Ralston Purina). Danforth was the author of the motivational book *I Dare You*, which is about standing tall and living tall. I would talk to him, and he gave me goals I hoped I would be able to accomplish — and I think I have.”

**What does being a philanthropist mean to you?**

“When you have money, you feel like you are doing your part by giving back to the community. But I also give more than just money. I have a reputation at Splendido that I never sit still! I keep very active.

“I’m now working on scholarships for the Epsilon Sigma Alpha Foundation. We receive about 5,000 applications for 35 scholarships each year. I’m one of the coordinators and will have about 500 applications to go through. I also am a board member of the Employee Scholarship Fund at Splendido.

“I’ve been a supporter of the Red Cross for many years, and I recently gave a gift to the American Red Cross in honor of my family to create a Children’s Room in their new building in Tucson.”

**What are you most passionate about when it comes to giving?**

“Music is my big passion. Growing up in Missouri, I took piano lessons, sang in choirs, and started going to the St. Louis Symphony while I was in grade school. I have been actively involved with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra since 1984. Today I’m a major sponsor of the Southern Arizona Symphony Orchestra and Tucson Chamber Artists.

“My other great interest is my involvement with the College of the Ozarks in Missouri, which presented me with an honorary Doctorate of Performing Arts last May. At this college, every student has a job. They don’t pay tuition — they work. They have a museum and I am donating letters from my father’s side of the family that were written during the Gold Rush days, along with my father’s WWI medals and other pins.

**Is there any advice you would offer others about giving?**

“Start with organizations that gave you guidance. For example, if you were a Boy Scout or Girl Scout, you could give to them to help other children have the same experience and exposure.



Dorothy Vanek takes time out from philanthropic work for this portrait.

“You have to learn how to handle your money. I learned that at an early age, but so many young people today max out their credit cards and have a huge mortgage. They want it all right away. We saved before we bought. You need to plan ahead — compulsive buying is not the way to go. If we didn’t have the money, we didn’t buy it.”

**What did you think when you found out you won this award?**

“It was overwhelming. You never dream you’ll ever get an award like this!” ▶

“You have to learn how to handle your money. I learned that at an early age, but so many young people today max out their credit cards and have a huge mortgage.”