CHAIRMAN’S MESSAGE

PIEDMONT CASA volunteers are special. Advocating for abused and neglected children is extremely challenging and often emotional work. It’s terribly frustrating at times, but the moments of success bring euphoria on a unique and deeply personal level. People apply to be CASA volunteers for myriad reasons – some are compelled to help children, some want to learn the ins and outs of juvenile court, some want to make positive use of their own healed wounds. The typical CASA volunteer remains with our program for about two years, the duration of many of our cases. What is more unusual is the volunteer who remains with Piedmont CASA for 5 years or more, making a difference on multiple cases for multiple children. And what is altogether rare is the volunteer who retires and then returns five years later for more.

Ruth Geils was first inducted as a CASA volunteer in 1997. She says that her background in social work in combination with her own identification with children who had no voice (or were afraid to use it) and a passion for “difference” made her a prime candidate. When she saw a Piedmont CASA ad on TV, she felt personally called and began the process of becoming a court appointed special advocate. It was, she felt, a “natural fit.”

It was a natural fit on Piedmont CASA’s end as well. From a graduate school placement on Riker’s Island where she had worked with adolescents, to her career in social work, to her volunteer position at juvenile court writing social histories, Ruth brought a great deal of experience and interest to her role as CASA Volunteer. Ruth volunteered with the program for eight years, and during that time she served on six cases, advocating for eight children. As an exemplary volunteer, Ruth explored every avenue on a case – she examined medical records and school records; she traveled when placements changed; she interviewed all parties to a case, making sure her information was thorough and current; and most of all, she served the children for whom she advocated fully and unequivocally. Her passion for the work was evident, and her commitment was clear. What was also clear, however, was that after eight years, she burned out. Ruth was “making herself crazy” because she was always on the job; at 3:00am she would find herself mulling over the details of a case, worrying the minutiae and pondering the big picture. So, when that eighth child and sixth case came to closure, Ruth closed up her own files and returned them to the CASA office.

From 2005-2009 Ruth didn’t work a single case. Instead she focused on other passions: family, reading and baseball (she wanted to be an umpire, but second to that dream is the pleasure of watching the New York Yankees lose). Although she wasn’t a CASA volunteer anymore, Ruth maintained connections with Piedmont CASA – a lunch with Ruth Stone here and there, intermittent phone calls to see how things were going and regular donations to the organization – these were indicators that Ruth was still attached to the program. Ruth admits that she always...
thought about CASA, and she couldn’t let go of her passion for the “human puzzle.” And even though she became incredibly exasperated when there were too many bureaucratic roadblocks, she loved the collaborative effort between the people and agencies working for the good of a broader community family. Piedmont CASA continued to “call” Ruth Geils, and after five years, she answered the call again.

In 2010 at the age of 80, Ruth returned to Piedmont CASA for a seventh case, advocating for a ninth child. You see, Ruth believes that Piedmont CASA is the “greatest organization in the world,” and is absolutely necessary for our community’s children. The frustrations are minimal when compared to the need. Ruth believes, as all of our volunteers do, that these children not only deserve, but also require a voice in court. The ones who are supposed to be their primary advocates, parents and other caretakers, are either unable to or actively choose not to fulfill that role. So, the CASA volunteer steps in and speaks up. Ruth’s voice is, and always has been, strong and vital, especially in service to children.

Ruth Geils has spoken up for nine of our community’s children. She has helped to ensure that these children have the opportunity for a life where safety, stability and love are the principal elements, rather than fear, pain and uncertainty. And Ruth, who wishes the spotlight could shine on all her fellow volunteers whom she honors, extends a message to them: “You can come back!” This is challenging and emotional work – and those who are dedicated to it may want a respite. Ruth’s hope, and Piedmont CASA’s hope, is that all volunteers know that it’s never too late to make a difference for a child. Ruth Geils has made a profound difference for children. And she makes a difference for all of us at Piedmont CASA, as well. Thank you, Ruth! ■
In late April this year Piedmont CASA’s Board and staff gathered for an afternoon of discussion and planning. We talked about the changing nature of the cases assigned to CASA volunteers, the need for interpreters to help communicate with children and families who have come to live here from around the globe, and the issue of how best to help teens now and as they “age out” of the system. As we planned ways to address these important challenges, we realized they would require even more resources.

“Philanthropy is the mystical mingling of an artful asker, a joyful giver, and a grateful recipient.” This oft quoted saying helps to make simple what many think of as a complicated process. Seeking, receiving and acknowledging charitable giving is more art than science because it is all about people, and we are different one from another. I believe there are as many motivations for giving as there are donors; however, most donors care deeply about what they support and want to be sure that the dollars they give are used well in the short term and have an impact in the long term. Ruth Stone, in the words of her staff colleagues, “squeezes every dollar.” The Friends of CASA committee and the boards over the years have been persistent and artful in their asking. We believe givers feel good about their gifts because they understand the need: more often than any of us would like, local children are neglected or abused, and a court of law must step in and decide where the child should live and what services should be made available to that child. We gain confidence from the fact that 88% of our gifts are given by people who have given before. And, each new year others join the effort. We hope and trust that the organization shows its gratitude first, by using each gift well, second by enhancing and improving our services every year, and finally by saying thank you, over and over and over again. CASA is blessed with a cadre of donors who give, and give, and give. Your interest, involvement and support advance the mission every day. Thank you!

Thank you for supporting and believing in Piedmont CASA. Your contributions to our Annual Fund make an extraordinary difference to our community’s children. If you haven’t yet made your tax-deductible gift to Piedmont CASA, there is still time to contribute!

FALL 2010 TRAINING BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER

To find out how you can help abused and neglected children find safe, permanent homes please call Piedmont CASA at (434) 971-7515, email pcasa@embarqmail.com, or apply on-line at www.pcasa.org.

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