

One Child at a Time, One Issue at a Time was this year's theme for the April 11th Child Abuse Awareness Luncheon, chaired by Diana Zubrowski, Standard, and presented by Lazydays and McNichols Company. Local celebrity and jazz aficionado, Belinda Womack opened the program with a moving tribute to our late founders Olin Mott and Dottie Berger MacKinnon. Gayle Sierens, WFLA News Anchor was the emcee that led the audience through this educational and inspiring program.

Paolo Annino, FSU College of Public Law and Attorney Ad Litem, passionately shared the plight of medically fragile children in our State's child welfare system to an audience of 500 corporate leaders, law enforcement, judicial, and social service providers. Inspired by a class action suit to provide better living conditions for medically fragile and complex children, the state has made great strides in reducing the number of children in nursing facilities. Unfortunately, there still remain almost 200 children languishing in nursing homes. Joshua House is striving to open a home on site to provide a more child friendly living environment for these "forgotten" children.

In addition, Special Agent Gregory Christopher, Federal Bureau of Investigations expert on Human Trafficking, updated the audience about the progress made in addressing this issue that has invaded our local communities and foster care system.

Check out the write up on the winners of the Olin Mott Golden Heart, Dottie Berger MacKinnon Wings of Inspiration, and Bob Thomas Star of Philanthropy awards below. Special thanks to all our sponsors; and kudos to our industrious committee, Tasmin Beatty, Rob Catoe, Molly Crews, Ann Elliott, Suzy Holley, and Judge Tracy Sheehan. The event proceeds netted over \$100,000 for abused, abandoned, and neglected children.

Olin Mott Golden Heart Award

Congregation Beth Am



So much can be accomplished in a life well lived. If any of you are in any way familiar with Olin Mott, one of the founders of Joshua House, then you would know what we mean. His passing almost a year ago has left a huge hole in this community. The life he led was remarkable in so many ways. The indomitable spirit of this iconic Tampa business man would take Olin Mott from selling peanuts to feed his family during the great depression to creating a successful, well-known tire business.

Along the way, he earned a Purple Heart during the attack on Pearl Harbor and performed charitable work large and small for all the 60 years he lived in Tampa. The Olin Mott Golden Heart Award was created to honor the myriad of charitable acts that Olin participated in. Yet no words or even an award could ever describe the truly generous heart that was within him.

Olin Mott devoted himself to the Florida State Fair, local 4-H clubs the University of South Florida, elementary schools, migrant workers, and most especially the children at Joshua House. He was always willing to lend a hand and had a full and giving heart. He is greatly missed by the entire Tampa Bay Community.

This year's award recipient is a group of individuals. Congregation Beth Am is a Jewish Synagogue that has dedicated 14 years to making Christmas and Easter a wonderful day full of life enriching activities where the residents feel acceptance, and love. Some holidays are emotionally difficult; especially for foster children. These holidays are constant reminders that they are not with their families. They feel more profoundly abandoned. Worse yet, a family member will sometimes make promises to visit for the holiday, when this doesn't happen; the foster child is even more devastated. At Joshua House, we have had Congregation Beth Am volunteers make the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter their own special days to perform services for the children and teens residing there.

Christmas mornings are spent sitting side by side with the child or teen helping to assemble toys and games, stuffing batteries into electronics and helping to free gifts from those impossible heat sealed plastic containers. By mid-day cookies are decorated, arts and crafts are completed and photos are taken for lifelong preservation of memories. Most importantly, every resident has been made the sole focus of someone's undivided attention; acknowledging that that particular child's gifts were the most extraordinary and unique. Congregation Beth Am volunteers arrange and supply every activity, help clean up bits of paper, plastic, ribbon and bows; and assure that the staff that cannot be with their own relatives on the holiday have enough support to make their day easier.

In addition, Congregation Beth Am have held multiple "wish list" drives every year throughout the years, collecting fashionable clothes, hygiene products, school supplies, and bedding. Their Sunday school classes have donated their monetary charitable collections to provide life enriching activities for the children and both their Sisterhood and Men's Club have adopted numerous projects that have directly benefitted Joshua House.

Dottie Berger MacKinnon Wings of Inspiration Award

Merrilyn Crosson



What makes an ordinary person extraordinary? They possess certain traits that inspire others to want to be better, they literally "bring out the best in people." These unique individuals fill us with a desire to improve ourselves because we see in them qualities that we admire and wish to emulate. They are passionate, outspoken, fearless, determined, dedicated, and fully committed. They don't just talk the talk, they walk the walk.

I think most people reading this article know that the late Dottie Berger MacKinnon was an extraordinary woman. She was a tireless advocate for foster children. Starting as a board member for Children's Home Society of Florida, she led the campaign to create Joshua House. Working with the other founders, she was the visionary that helped to build this incredible shelter for abused, abandoned, and neglected children 23 years ago. She went on to create Friends of Joshua House Foundation, Kids Charity of Tampa Bay, and A Kid's Place. She was a force to be reckoned with. After launching Joshua House in 1992, she became increasingly entrenched in the child welfare community. Not as an employee, but as a volunteer, an advocate, a champion, and then as a leader. She was an inspiration to so many of us.

Countless people have stated that they were mentored by Dottie...or that they wished they could be just like her.

On April 11, 2014, Judge Tracy Sheehan and A.D. Sandy MacKinnon honored Merrilyn Crosson with the first Dottie Berger MacKinnon Wings of Inspiration Award. After retiring from a successful teaching profession, Ms. Crosson began volunteering as a guardian ad litem. Guardian ad litem are literally the “voices” of our vulnerable children, acting in their best interest and advocating for them. She has impressively represented 68 children over the past 7 years. Not only does she carry a full load of children who have various levels of need, from infants to teens, to special needs; she is fully dedicated to the Guardian ad Litem Program. In addition to taking on individual cases; she has also taken on the leadership role of being a Master Guardian. Ms. Crosson attends pre-service trainings to give prospective guardians her insight into volunteering and she serves as a mentor to new guardians in order to ensure that they are equipped to confidently accept a case and begin advocating for their own children.

Merrilyn Crosson, like the namesake of the award presented to her, has demonstrated the ability to inspire others with her passion and commitment to abused, abandoned, and neglected children. She has done so with a dedicated focus on assuring that each child is respected as an individual with unique needs and desires. Her focus has always been to be the voice of the child. She is fully committed to being there for “her children, our children.”

Merrilyn Crosson has made a significant difference in the lives of the children she’s represented, the volunteers she’s recruited and the GALs she has inspired, mentored and trained. Congratulations on being honored as the first recipient of the Dottie Berger MacKinnon Wings of Inspiration award!

Bob Thomas Star of Philanthropy Award

Skip Glass



Often times a philanthropist wishes to remain anonymous, giving gifts for the pure love of humanity and benevolence. It is difficult to thank these discreet donors and even more challenging to recognize them for their generosity. One such donor is Skip Glass, CEO and President of TransWorld Diversified Services.

Over ten years ago the Friends of Joshua House Foundation was seeking a home outside the gates of Joshua House. Establishing and setting up an operations center can be costly and the foundation wanted to maintain its integrity of committing its fundraising dollars to directly benefitting the children of Joshua House. In stepped Skip Glass. Offering gratis office space and the infrastructure to support it; he has provided everything from the square footage of office and storage space to all utilities, security service, cleaning service, web hosting, data, IT support, a shared receptionist, and copy machines to copy paper. In ten years of offering a home to Friends of Joshua House Foundation he has also included its staff as part of the TransWorld family; celebrating holidays and milestones throughout the years. Skip Glass is a long time resident of Tampa and is dedicated to supporting at risk children, whether displaced or medically challenged as well as non-kill organizations which support the rescue and care of animals.

He extended his generosity to include space for other foster care providers like Kids Charity of Tampa Bay and A Kid's Place for its project development. His generosity is limitless.

His business, TransWorld Diversified Services, has subsidiary companies that have also supported the foundation and Joshua House. Paci's Pizza has been a long time supplier of pizzas for events for the kids and staff, has fed hard working volunteers, and helped support fundraising events. Sensory 5, the graphic design company, has designed every event invitation, newsletter (including this one), banner, flier, brochure, poster, envelope and business card. Always providing the design work and at times picking up the tab for printing. As a matter of fact, the employees at TransWorld have all volunteered at Joshua House, in the office, at events, and even emulate their leader by being donors and philanthropists as well. It is honestly impossible to quantify his gifts as anything less than "priceless."

Much like Robert "Bob" Thomas, the namesake of this award and late founder of Joshua House, Skip Glass has demonstrated a compassion and devotion to our community by dedicating not only his time and talents, but also his treasures. His gifts have improved the quality of life in our community and most especially at Joshua House. On April 11, 2014, Tracy Falkowitz, chair of the Friends of Joshua House board presented the Bob Thomas Star of Philanthropy award in absentia to Skip Glass's executive aid, Natalie Cacciatore. Congratulations Skip Glass!