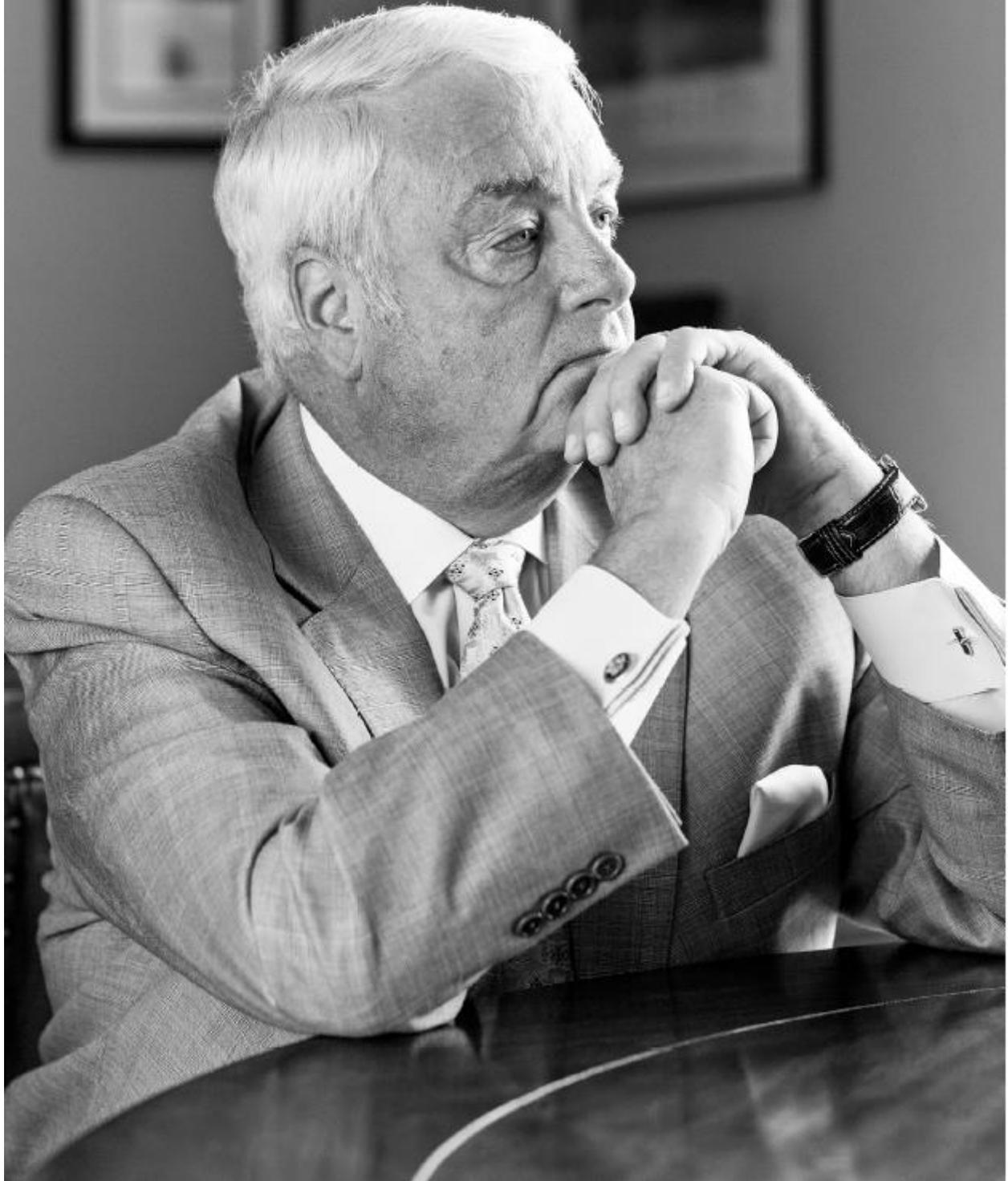


NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE

by Gina Mayfield



On a balmy evening in June, Joe King sauntered into the Hilton in Town Square. Joe knew he was nominated for a Southlake Chamber of Commerce award, but “I didn’t know what I was up for when I walked into the ballroom,” he recalls. A handful of awards were handed out that evening, then came the Citizen of the Year Award — the only category in which nominees were named. Their photos flashed across the screen: The mayor. The former mayor. A city council member. The beloved chair of the GRACE Gala. And then there was Joe.

“I’m going, ‘Wow,’” Joe says. “I have such respect for these people.” Joe sat there, with his wife, Sandy, by his side, just grateful to be a part of the club. Then the emcee announced the winner. “When they called my name, I was the last one at the table to realize it was me,” he says. As the crowd jumped to its feet and erupted in a sea of applause, Joe recalls, “All I heard were the words ‘Kids Matter.’”

As genuinely “shocked and surprised” as Joe was that evening, no one who knew him — and they all knew him. As president and CEO of Kids Matter International (KMI), a nonprofit designed to “bring hope and healing to orphaned, abandoned or disadvantaged children,” Joe’s focus has always been on others.



Growing up as an only child in Providence, Rhode Island, Joe had trouble in school. “I was not one of the smartest kids in class,” he recalls. “Through a bunch of circumstances, I ended up joining the Boy Scouts. It really, in so many ways, ended up changing my life. It gave me a lot more self-respect. It also showed me how great things are when you do things for others.”

After “flunking out” of Providence College, Joe joined the Army. “I came back and realized what I really wanted to do was to help children.” After earning a degree in nonprofit management from a little school in West Virginia, Joe returned to the Boy Scouts in Atlanta, this time as an Exploring Director. “I moved all over the country with them.”

In the years that followed, there was a regional director position for the international student exchange, Youth for Understanding, plus an impressive seven-year stretch as the director of fundraising for the U.S. Olympic Committee and two years as national director of development with United Cerebral Palsy in New York City.

During that time, a headhunter called and convinced Joe to relocate to a nondescript building at the intersection of Precinct Line and 183 in Hurst. There, in the late ’80s, a fledgling organization called Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was taking the country by storm. After a two-year stint, Joe left to start his own company, The Narragansett Group, which consults with national and international nonprofits and represents them in Washington, D.C.

Fast forward to 2006, friends convinced Joe to go down to Guatemala to visit a Christian orphanage. The group of six or seven really wanted to help financially, and they looked to their resident expert for guidance. He recommended starting a 501(c)3 in the United States (a decision anyone familiar with Third World logistics would understand), which eventually became KMI.

Joe asked a man who would later become his best friend, Coye Conner, if he would be chairman, and Joe was tasked with a volunteer assignment to “put the organization together and run it.” Years later, the board came back to him and asked if The Narragansett Group would take on the organization as a client. “The rest is history,” Joe says.

Continuing their work overseas, KMI supports an orphanage in India with 21 children in need due to a variety of circumstances, including natural disaster and political upheaval. In Honduras, a refuge for 11 girls being trafficked and abused is leading the way in the protection of children. “It was the first home of its kind in Honduras. It actually led — for the first time — to the arrest and prosecution of people that abused children sexually in Honduras.”



But as the group evolved, they came to a realization. “We wanted to do things domestically, we wanted to do things at home,” Joe says. “Now, 90 percent of what we do is in the North Texas area. We do quite a bit throughout the country, but we do most of our work right here.”

And the work seems to find them. One evening, a board member attended a Clothe A Child event at the Kohl’s in Irving. “That particular night, they had to send 50 children away because they didn’t have the funds to take them shopping,” Joe says. Coincidentally, the next evening was KMI’s annual gala. “We contained the board of directors that night and appropriated \$5,000 so that each of those children could go shopping the very next week,” Joe recalls.

That was the seed that planted Around the Block. Held each November, the program invites underprivileged school age children and their families to Kohl’s in Southlake (and Southwest Fort Worth), hands them \$100 to spend and pairs them with one of hundreds of volunteer personal shoppers. They shop the department store at deep discounts, choosing their very own brand-new clothes, some for the very first time. “Most of these people have never been in a department store, believe it or not,” Joe says. “And they’re from our area.” Last year, 1,201 children walked away with newfound confidence. “We get letters, phone calls, emails from teachers saying, ‘I have never seen Johnny so happy.’” Joe says. “It’s because he comes to school the next morning wearing a brand-new shirt and brand new jeans.”

Over the years, other organizations have joined in, Boston’s Gourmet Pizza, plus the Ryan Palmer Foundation and Buckner International, which donate backpacks and shoes, respectively. The Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation provides books for each child.

Along with the big stuff, come the little things. Remember hearing about the Cub Scouts in North Richland Hills whose trailer



was stolen? Three days later it was quietly replaced. “We do that kind of thing all the time,” Joe says, humbly. During the summer, they work with area churches to feed children who are on free or reduced-price lunches during the school year. “Whenever resources are needed to take a child out of crisis, that’s our goal, that’s our mission and that’s our vision,” Joe says.

Today, the orphanage in Guatemala where it all began is totally self-sufficient. “It is now a private school, an orphanage and a library,” Joe says. Because the orphanage allows children from outside to attend the school, the tuition makes it all possible.

But when self-sufficiency isn’t possible, how do they do it? There’s the Oktoberfest raffle plus a long list of impressive corporate partners who sponsor, underwrite or outright contribute to their programs. And then there’s the Charity Ball, which, just a few short years ago, took place under a tent in the Carrabba’s parking lot. Things have changed over the years. “We fill the ballroom of the Southlake Hilton. We have raised as much as \$800,000.” In one night. Whether it’s time, talent or treasure that’s needed, it’s always there.

“I’ve been very fortunate and blessed, that’s a fact,” Joe says. “Here in the Southlake area, I’ve got to tell you, what I do comes very easy. It’s because of the generosity of the people in the community — and the businesses in the community — it really is.”

This article was originally published in the Southlake Style, November 5th, 2014. To learn more about Kids Matter International and the opportunity to volunteer or contribute, please visit www.kidsmatterinternational.org