

Quick Looks

Photography by TOM McNEILL

Community Philanthropy in a New Hotel

This fall, a new 124-room Courtyard by Marriott hotel opens in Centerra Park in Lebanon, N.H. The facility, managed by the True North Hotel Group, provides high end hotel rooms and desperately needed conference space to the Upper Valley. While the ability to respond to local business demands is very important, the principals in the project are equally enthusiastic about the philanthropic component of the properties.

David Leatherwood, the managing partner of the project, has long been a philanthropist. In January 1998, David and Loretta Leatherwood's son Chapin was born at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. Without warning, he stopped breathing just after he was delivered. He spent the next 11 days in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Children's Hospital at Dartmouth (CHaD), and emerged healthy. Today he is a thriving 8-year-old boy. His parents never forgot the extraordinary compassion and expert care their family enjoyed at CHaD, and Leatherwood immediately became involved with the hospital and was later appointed President of the Friends of CHaD.

In 2000, Leatherwood was invited by then-dean John Baldwin to become an inaugural member of the Dean's Council for the Future of the Medical School. The dean asked council members to "think outside the box" about fundraising. Leatherwood realized that many entrepreneurs cannot afford to write large checks to charity while growing their businesses, but they can utilize their talents to support philanthropy by dedicating a small percentage of their profits to charity.

Leatherwood and his business partner, Eric Sachsse, president of Norwich Partners, formed a partnership in 2003 with Jenny Williams of Norwich, Vt. They purchased the Residence Inn by Marriott at Centerra, built the Courtyard by Marriott at Centerra and formed the Community Partners Hotel Group (CPHG), a local group of investors and philanthropists. Leatherwood and Williams, a nonprofit fundraiser for 20 years, also established the Children's Fund of the Upper Valley, a component fund of the Upper Valley Region of New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. Through the hotels, CPHG is committed



David Leatherwood and Jenny Williams

to contributing at least \$1 million to the fund over the next 10 years to support organizations, such as CHaD, and projects that improve the lives of children in the local community through quality health care, child care, arts and educational initiatives.

"We hope other local businesses and entrepreneurs will follow our example," says Williams. "We want to create a groundswell of philanthropic support for worthy local causes."

To celebrate the opening of the new Courtyard by Marriott, the Children's Fund advisors have recommended a number of grants to local nonprofits, such as a vegetable garden designed, built and harvested by The Upper Valley Haven. Another grant will help the Norwich Child Care Center renovate a second classroom for 2 year olds, which is the age group with the fastest growing demand for child care. Hanover Youth in Action, Family Place, Vermont Institute of Natural Sciences (VINS), Montshire Museum of Science, Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF), Children's Hospital at Dartmouth (CHaD) and the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College will also receive funding as part of the opening.

While these grants will certainly help children in the Upper Valley, Leatherwood and Williams emphasize that this is only the beginning. The Children's Fund is also interested in entrepreneurial philanthropy, which helps the grantees expand their own organizational or fundraising capacity; and in programs or projects that expose children and teens to the joys of volunteerism and giving.

— Jenny Williams