

A Gift for Giving

"No one has ever become poor by giving."

- Anne Frank

By Cindy Hodnett

Photography by Jonathan McCardell Photography

During the holidays, the thoughts of many people turn to helping those less fortunate. With images of Ebenezer Scrooge and Tiny Tim dominating prime time and bell-ringers stationed outside almost every shopping center, the concept of "giving back" takes center stage during November and December. However, for many people, giving back is a way of life that is not confined to the holiday season. And while the various forms of philanthropy differ from person to person, the desired outcome is the same; by giving back, Triad residents hope to enrich the lives of everyone by improving the lives of a few.

Philanthropy has a strong history in North Carolina, and Triad residents reap the benefits of this history every day. From the Grays to the Cones to the Reynolds, numerous Triad leaders have generously donated their time, money and resources to improving the local quality of life, and the result is a diverse Triad community that is rich in the arts, education, business and medicine.

American philosopher and psychologist William James wrote that "the greatest use of a life is to spend it on something that will outlast it," and for those who have visited Reynolda House and strolled in the gardens or benefited from treatment at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine or Moses Cone, the truth behind this statement is readily apparent. Consequently, many of the Triad's most notable citizens are renowned as much for their generosity as for their business accomplishments. But North Carolina's impressive philanthropic past did not end with earlier generations. Today, the art of giving back is alive and well in the Triad, and several local residents are proving that philanthropy can take on many forms in the 21st century.





*"It just makes your
community a better
place to live when
you give something
back."*

—Tedd Belcher

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Three Passions, Three Ways of Giving

At first glance, Todd Belcher, Ashley Lown and Marilyn Johnson might not seem to have a lot in common. One is a well-known Winston-Salem artist, another is a busy mom with two kids and an active work/family schedule and the third is a grandmother of nine with a thriving craft business in Lewisville. But although diverse in their lifestyles, all three of these individuals share a common characteristic – they are making a big difference in the lives of others in their communities and beyond through their unique philanthropic endeavors.

Animal Appreciation

“It just makes your community a better place to live when you give something back,” says custom portrait artist Todd Belcher. “And it makes you feel so good to know you’re part of something making a difference.”

Belcher is an accomplished artist who works with his wife, Stephanie, at Jimmydog Design Group, an art and graphic design company based in Winston-Salem. The couple created the company in 2002 after deciding to open their own business and soon after decided to name it after a beloved terrier, Jimmy, faithful canine companion of 12 years. “We had Jimmy from 1991 to 2003,” Belcher recalls. “He is the dog on our logo, and his was the first dog painting I ever did. That was in 2002 and when I started painting dogs.”

Nearly five years later, Belcher has established a loyal following and a strong reputation as a pet portrait artist, and his work has been featured in many regional shows and publications. In addition to his pet portraits, Belcher accepts commissions for custom portraits of children, adults, architecture and professional illustrations, working from photographs and even sometimes merging several pictures together to create an entirely new image.

Stephanie is the Creative Director for Jimmydog Design Group and works with many corporate clients, nonprofit organizations and business associations. And while both Todd and Stephanie stay busy with company assignments, the couple says that Jimmydog Design Group allows them to do work they love and to give back to organizations that benefit animals.

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The Belchers have always enjoyed sharing their home with pets, and Todd says the couple's charitable activities are a natural progression of their fondness for four-legged friends. "When I was growing up, we had a dog inside our house, and I learned then how smart and sociable animals were," he says. "That experience really gave me a lifelong love of animals."

"Stephanie and I have two dogs, Freddie and Joey, and they are both rescue animals," continues Belcher. "Stephanie began volunteering with the Forsyth Humane Society in 2002, and she started out walking dogs. Then she became involved with some of the committees and helped with the first Furrball event, and I donated a gift certificate for a portrait. As she did more, I gradually got more involved as well."

Focusing their philanthropic interests on both the local and national level, the Belchers donate time and money to the Forsyth Humane Society and the Best Friends Animal Society, a Utah animal adoption agency where animals are never destroyed. Each organization serves an important purpose, says Belcher, and the couple contributes in a variety of ways.

"Stephanie is still working with the Humane Society and last year, I painted a dog for the Art Unleashed! fundraiser," Belcher says. "Art Unleashed! ended up raising \$91,000 for the Humane Society, and it was great to be part of such a successful event. We also donate to the Best Friends Animal Society because it is the largest no-kill shelter in the United States," he continues. "They don't refuse any animals, and if an animal isn't adopted, it gets to stay at the Society."

As part of his volunteer efforts on behalf of animals, Belcher also tries to educate the public on important issues like spaying and neutering their pets. He ties the welfare of animals to the overall desirability of any community and says there are many misconceptions about animals that need to be addressed.

"Education is the main thing, especially when it comes to spaying and neutering," he says. "For example, some people think that neutering dogs makes them more aggressive and that's just not true. People need to know more about overpopulation, and they need to know how to take care of their pets – it's not just giving them a bowl of water and food. Pets need social interaction and a place to run around."

Todd says that he and Stephanie will con-

tinue to pledge their time and resources to animal welfare organizations. It's a busy way of life, but one that the Belchers believe is extremely important. "If the animals are being taken care of, then the community is better," he concludes. "Some of the services offered by the Humane Society are free spaying and neutering with an application, a \$5 rabies clinic that is offered twice a year, the adoption center in the mall and emergency medical funds for sick animals. I really encourage people to support these organizations because although people in general treat their animals better than they used to, there are still a lot of problems. Places like the Humane Society and Best Friends make a big difference."



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