



susan smith

Susan Smith
by Kim Neill

Susan Smith's philanthropy grew from the humble beginnings of putting a hard-earned 25 cents into the collection plate every Sunday, to a full-time, passion-driven career that goes far beyond financial support. For over 30 years, she has modeled and exemplified philanthropy by donating her time, abilities, creativity, problem-solving skills and resources to support athletics, arts and dance. Her list of accomplishments includes advocacy and leadership for a variety of community organizations such as the Boise Art Museum, FUNDSY, Idaho Women's Charitable Foundation and St. Joseph's School.

A commitment to her community and willingness to share resources drives Susan's incredible work ethic and dedication to the organizations and educational institutions she serves. She is most passionate about children's programs—she supports not only her own children's activities, but the community's children as well. She inspires others with her energy and generosity and is a friend to all.

In 1976, as a newcomer to Boise looking for a way to meet people in an unfamiliar town, Susan joined the Boise Art Museum's Beaux Arts Société, where she co-chaired the children's festival. Although she admits to the initial difficulty of making cold calls to recruit volunteers for the event, she persevered, and the rest is history. She became excellent at recruiting and delegating, absolute necessities in the business of philanthropy.

After putting aside her nursing career and balancing her parental duties, she pursued the responsibilities of supporting the nonprofit sector, including everything from organizing to collaborating, all the while developing and refining new and innate skills that would make her one of the most sought-after philanthropists in the Treasure Valley. Her dedication to philanthropic efforts has brought balance to both her personal life and the people she works with in the community. She feels privileged with the opportunity to meet and work with a variety of women.

Susan was one of the six founders of the Idaho Women's Charitable Foundation (IWCF), and she models in her own life the vision of IWCF: commitment to raising benevolent consciousness and impacting the community. She has great admiration for Colleen Willoughby, the woman who began the Washington Women's Foundation and the model on which IWCF is based. IWCF is a philanthropic foundation consisting of women who pool their financial resources to create funding opportunities for local community programs. Susan has been a powerhouse in raising IWCF's membership—from the original six people to its current 200 members.

Susan embraces the inevitable challenges and personal growth that come from working with the various organizations, for example, learning to have realistic expectations of what can be done, the importance of sharing a vision with others, aligning what she wants to do with what others want to do, willingness to learn new skills and jobs, and realizing that philanthropy can be a gradual process. She highlights the importance of really studying situations and being aware that people end up in desperate situations due to many different variables and circumstances that are out of their control. She says, "The most rewarding part of philanthropy is helping to support good ideas that affect the community, as well as learning about the work of inspired individuals." She has certainly proven to be a confident and accomplished leader, while remaining humble and resisting the accolades she regularly receives.

Unless you are directly involved in the sport of competitive swimming, you'd never know that Susan has been a guiding force for both the Boise YMCA and the Boise High School swim teams. She began as a parent supporter for her own children and grew into a one of the best swim meet directors around. Her very presence on the pool deck is advocacy for the sport of swimming.

While many parents have to be coerced on deck just to be event timers, Susan has worked through the ranks to become Meet Director. She willingly admits the intimidation she first felt at taking on a position so new and so huge, but after three years of meet directing, her perseverance gained her the comfort she needed with the organization (and disorganization) that goes into putting on a swim meet; she accomplishes this all through soft-spoken leadership and delegation, without having to be domineering.

In a football town like Boise, swimming still remains nearly invisible, with little recognition outside those directly involved with the sport, and even less from the local media. Susan's advice to fellow swimming advocates who would like to increase recognition for this lifetime sport: "Keep pushing for exposure in the media; support initiatives to make high school swimming a statewide, sanctioned sport; encourage political and community leaders to support facilities and programs that provide the swimming experience; and educate the community about the health benefits of swimming and its beneficial role as a conditioner for other sports."

Susan's many accomplishments have not been for personal acknowledgment. She performs her philanthropic work because it's needed, it's important, and she's willing to accomplish the task, whatever that may be. Her nurturing and motivating leadership style makes others want to be part of the team. According to Aristotle, "The greatest virtues are those which are most useful to other people," and Susan Smith exemplifies those very virtues.