Remembering Hank Auffarth

It’s hard to imagine The Child Center without Hank Auffarth, our most revered and dedicated board member of 30 years—including 13 as president. On August 22, Hank passed away while taking his morning walk on the beach. He was only 63, yet he left behind a charitable legacy that few people could achieve in many life times.

When Hank first joined The Child Center, the board was made up of PTA presidents, activists, and a few professionals, such as attorneys—but no business executives with entrepreneurial spirit. Arnold Frankel, president at the time, wanted to change that and set his sights on Hank, a bright young energetic banker. As soon as he arrived, Hank began bringing businessmen and women to the board, and private supporters to the agency. Under his tenure, The Child Center grew from a handful of local counseling centers into a multimillion-dollar agency helping 18,000 children a year.

“Hank loved people. And people loved Hank,” remembered Marge Richman, ex-board member of 50 years. “He exuded charm and had an amazing ability to get people to think about charity. Within moments of meeting you, he’d invite you to our golf outing or dinner dance. He brought in a huge segment of the business community in Queens.”

Sam Freed, long-time board member and friend remembers Hank’s unapologetic ability to ask people to help, reminding them it was for the kids. “A lot of people are timid about asking because they’re afraid of rejection. Hank didn’t care. His motivation was the goodness of The Child Center and its ability to help children facing horrendous problems.”

“Hank’s long career at banks in Queens County meant he knew everybody and everybody knew him. ‘He was like butter on a hot grill,’ said Sam. If he made a call to the president of a corporation for The Child Center, that man took the call because it was Hank from the Bank.”

“He’s going to be really missed,” said New York Assemblywoman Vivian Cook. “He was a lovely person, always talking about the needs of children. Once you met Hank, you just never forgot him.”

About 30 of our summer campers had the experience of a lifetime this summer, when they got to play tennis with global superstar Rafael Nadal at the US OPEN. The event was part of a new US Tennis Association project that brings players in touch with local Queens children.

Our children received a day of top-notch instruction and the opportunity to learn from professional players. The highlight was the moment Nadal entered. He rallied with the children, praising and thanking each. We give our sincerest thanks to Nadal for taking time from his busy schedule to inspire the young people we serve.
When I first arrived at The Child Center many years ago, I was taken by the fact that Hank Auffarth was the only board member who really understood how important it was to build a strong community of private supporters behind our work. During his 30 years with us, I don't think there was a single business or personal contact he didn't approach on our behalf.

And yet, despite all the passion he put into fundraising, I think his happiest times were when he was doing something with the kids, like the holiday party, or working on a project that would help them. Hank led teams of volunteers to paint many of our clinics. He was in his element during our South Jamaica playground build last year, happily leading people to do something that would benefit the children we serve.

Hank's love of life and people, especially children, are what made him who he was. That's why we feel so privileged that he made The Child Center a part of his life.

Our organization is filled with caring people who—like Hank—are profoundly devoted to kids. We come to work each day with the conviction that human beings can make a difference to one another. And we share the belief that all children—no matter the conditions they are born to—deserve a chance. I know that you believe this too.

Hank's passing brings me great sadness and many fond memories, because we worked together 26 years to build the organization. I have a sister with Down's Syndrome. Social workers made it possible for her to go to school, learn daily living skills, and have a good quality of life. They made a huge difference to our whole family. This motivated me to become a social worker myself. Since college, I've had many jobs at The Child Center. I've worked with drug-addicted mothers and abused children. Now I provide therapy to kids of all ages at the Flushing Clinic.

If I had to pick a kid I'm really proud of it would be Carlos. When he was 16, he was defiant, breaking curfew, stealing, and fighting with his stepfather. When his mother found him cutting his arms with a razor blade and talking about suicide she took him to the hospital. They referred him to us.

Carlos' mother got involved in his son’s treatment. This was key to his progress. She helped Carlos look into the future and improve his self-esteem by identifying his accomplishments and clarifying how his family felt about him. I gave her information on teen development. This helped her focus on him more and not take things personally.

Carlos and I set goals together and improved his social skills so he'd have positive experiences with friends. We also worked on academics. When teachers reported that Carlos attended class, did his homework, and participated, he earned privileges or extra allowance. This was an incentive. He stopped cutting, and his grades improved. He got on better with his stepfather. Last summer, he got a job at a deli and loved earning money. He's much more optimistic and stable, debating about college or the military. We're wrapping up treatment. I'll miss him, but I am so proud of him and his mom.

The Child Center of NY is a 58-year-old nonprofit agency whose mission is to help at-risk children and youth succeed in life.

Increasing Our Impact

For decades, The Child Center has worked at the forefront of child abuse prevention at its centers in Jamaica and Flushing. Now, thanks to a new city contract, we are extending these services to the high-stress neighborhoods of Elmhurst and Corona. Within just these few square miles, 1100 children were reported for abuse and neglect last year. Citywide, the number is staggering, at nearly 94,000 reports in 2010.

Child abuse is a major public health problem that impacts brain hardwiring, mental health, social functioning, physical health, and life expectancy. Beyond the human toll are immense financial costs. A 2007 national report tallied the annual US economic cost of child abuse at $104 billion.

The good news is that research repeatedly proves that high-quality prevention programs are effective. The Child Center uses evidence-based practices, including home visits, parent education, addiction treatment, and counseling—all in more than a dozen languages.

Where Our Funding Goes

Administration and Fundraising 11.6%

Programs and Services 88.4%

For more information, please visit www.childcenterny.org or call 718.651.7770 ext. 210.

The Child Center is a Better Business Bureau Approved Charity.