

A Woman with Purpose

By Pam Knepper

Bellevue Club member Joan Wallace believes each person lives to serve a purpose and has an obligation to give back to make this planet a better place for the next generation.

"I firmly believe we are all here for a reason," says Joan. "Whether we drive a taxi, head up a corporation or stay at home with our kids, we all need to perform these duties the best way we know how and, in doing so, try to make our world a better place for our children and grandchildren."

Joan has mainly focused her energies on making the Eastside a better place. A native of Newfoundland, Canada, Joan moved to the Seattle area in 1964 to attend college. She graduated in 1970 from Seattle Pacific University with a bachelor's degree in English education. While attending SPU, Joan married Robert Wallace. A few years later the couple moved from Seattle to Bellevue, cementing their relationship with the Eastside as home and the place to raise their two children.

"When I had my children, I knew my purpose at that point was to stay at home and take care of them," says Joan. "Mothers play a tremendous role in the lives of their kids. Luckily, I had the luxury of being able to stay at home with my children when they were young."

But five years into motherhood, Joan's life took a turn when she decided to buy a franchise: Image Improvement, Inc.

"At first, I struggled with the decision because I knew my responsibilities would limit time with my kids," remembers Joan. "On the other hand, I hoped my talents would benefit other people. So I decided to give it a try."

As owner and director of Image Improvement, Inc., Joan traveled throughout the Northwest speaking to people about how to improve their marketability.

"When I first started I was still able to spend a lot of time with my children," says Joan. "But as my business grew I found myself being gone all the time. This was a conflict for me because I loved my job, but I also wanted to be home with my kids."

After eight years, Joan decided to sell her business.

"I had always said my first priority was to my children," remembers Joan. "Unfortunately, my business had grown so much it wasn't allowing me the time I wanted to be with them."

Soon afterward, Joan decided to enter the world of commercial real estate.

"My kids were in school at that point and I didn't need to be at home all day long. So when my friend Dick asked if I would be interested in joining his commercial real estate company on a part-time basis, I decided to give it a try because I love to learn new things," says Joan. "My husband also worked in commercial real estate and it always intrigued me."

Equipped with a real estate license, but with little knowledge of the field, Joan says she learned the ropes while on the job.

"My office was next to Dick's and I literally learned the business by listening to him talk to people on the phone," says Joan.

Five years later Joan and her husband joined forces, and with the creation of Wallace Properties, Inc., added commercial brokerage services to her husband's existing real estate investment and property management firm. Twenty-two years later, Joan serves as the company's president, overseeing policy, long-range planning, operational objectives and the day-to-day brokerage activities.



Joan is also active in the brokerage of investment properties, retail and office leasing and is a specialist in medical office space.

Aside from her commercial real estate activities, Joan takes personal pride in having served on a multitude of Eastside boards over the years.

As 1999 chair of the Board of Trustees of Overlake Hospital Medical Center and chair of the building committee, Joan drew on her expertise in medical office space, overseeing construction of the 210,000-square-foot, six-story Overlake Medical Office Tower.

"My involvement with Overlake Hospital Medical Center was in large part because of my father-in-law, Dr. Marvin Wallace," says Joan. "He was a member of the founding group of inspired physicians committed to ensuring that Eastside residents didn't have to drive over the bridge to obtain high-quality health care. They wanted Overlake to set the standard in health care and so did I."

Over the years, Joan has also served on the board of the Bellevue Downtown Association, the board of



LEFT Joan and Robert on vacation at Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

OPPOSITE PAGE Joan and Robert at their commercial real estate company, Wallace Properties, Inc.

RIGHT In March 2004, Joan served as one of the master of ceremonies at Overlake Hospital's Bandage Ball, the hospital's annual fundraiser.

BELOW RIGHT Joan and her granddaughter Madison Knopf enjoying each other's company.

BELOW LEFT Student at Roosevelt Elementary School in Granger, Washington.



Seattle Pacific University, as chair of the board of the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, and in 2001 she was named "Bellevue Citizen of the Year." Currently, she is serving on the board of directors of Northwest Medical Teams International (www.northwestmedicalteams.com). With offices in Bellevue and Tigard, Ore., this faith-based organization partners with existing in-country organizations deploying volunteer medical and dental teams and supplies in areas of disaster within the United States and around the world. In March, Joan went to Uganda and Ethiopia to work in the International Displaced Persons camps.

"This was an honor and a dream come true for me," says Joan. "What a privilege to be able to serve in such a time of need. In addition, I feel that now I can really speak to the work that this wonderful organization accomplishes."

In addition to Joan's many high-profile leadership positions, she has recently volunteered her time to get a new project off the ground, the Eastside's KidsQuest Children's Museum (www.kidsquestmuseum.org). Serving as co-chair of the capital campaign, the museum is scheduled to open this fall in Bellevue's Factoria Mall.

"We have already raised \$2.3 million with \$1.2 million left to go," says Joan. "Luckily for us, there are many corporations and individuals in the community who see the need for the Eastside to have its own children's museum."

Aimed at children 12 and under, when completed the museum will offer hands-on, interactive exhibits and programs designed to help children, and their families or school groups, explore science, art, technology, culture and life experiences.

"As a grandmother who would love to take her grandchildren to this museum, I feel fortunate I can be involved in such an exciting project," says Joan.

When she is not busy raising money for Kids-

Quest, Joan is collecting money, toys and clothing for the children at Roosevelt Elementary School in Granger, Washington.

"It all began last Thanksgiving when my sister-in-law, who is the principal at Roosevelt, told me she was concerned that her students wouldn't be getting enough to eat over the Christmas break," says Joan. "Ninety-six percent of the students who attend Roosevelt live below the poverty line and depend on the food they receive at school."

Joan says after she had that conversation with her sister-in-law, there was a voice inside that kept nagging at her to do something about it.

"I sent out an e-mail to 200 of my closest friends asking them to send me \$100, so we could buy grocery gift cards for the students' families," remembers Joan. "The response was absolutely incredible. We ended up



raising \$27,000 and anonymously distributed gift cards to 232 families. I called it my Christmas miracle."

But Joan's help didn't stop there. In January, she spent a day at Roosevelt getting to know the students and assessing the needs of the school.

"It was an eye-opening experience for me," says Joan. "These children are so bright, but have so little. For them, school is everything. My heart just went out to them."

Having established the Friends of Granger charity, Joan immediately began soliciting funds to buy new technology for the school and collecting toys and used clothes for the children. Much like her Christmas miracle, again the giving has been incredible.

"My work in the community is my way of giving thanks to God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon me and my family. I am trying my best to make my life a living expression of the gratitude I feel."