

A Look at What's Ahead



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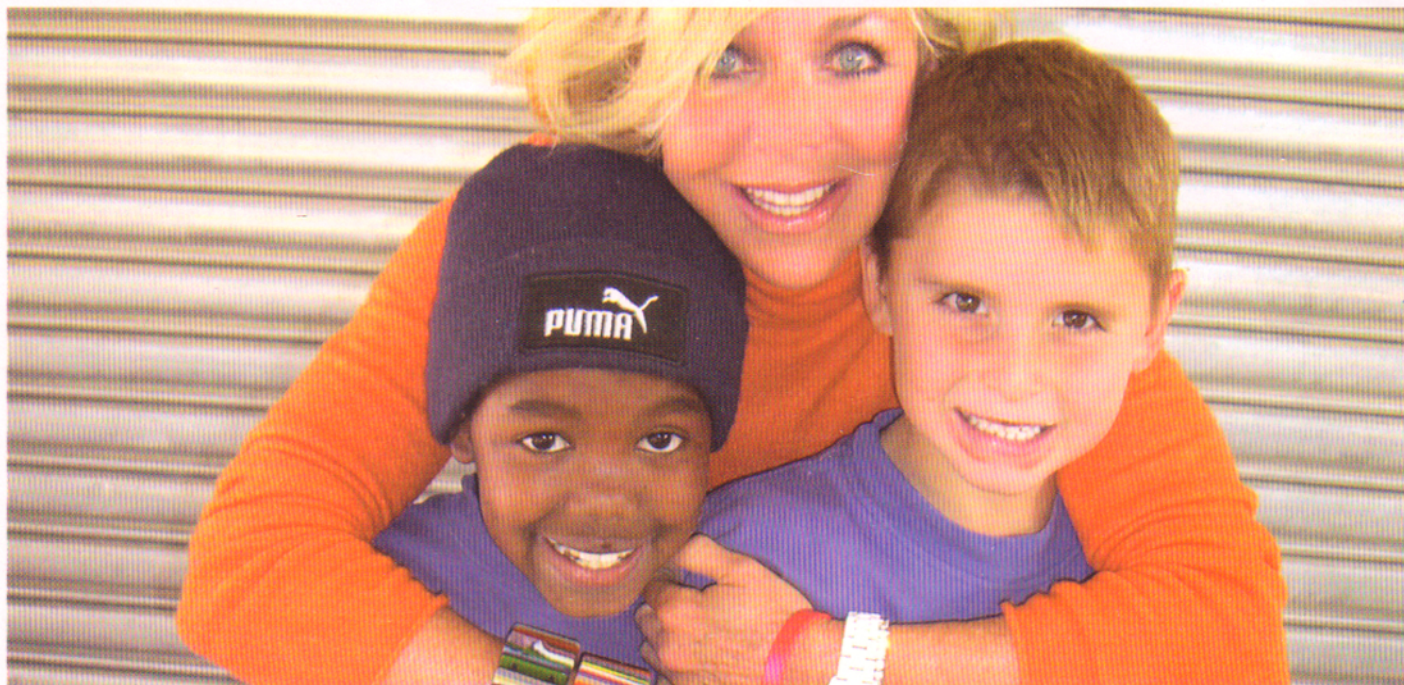


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Downturn. What downturn? Members say business is still going strong, and they don't see it slowing down—at least not for another year.



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One Child at a Time

Designer Trisha Wilson uses the power of education to give back to the disadvantaged

JUST OVER 10 YEARS AGO, Trisha Wilson, founder of her namesake award-winning design firm, Wilson Associates, started the Wilson Foundation to endow financially disadvantaged high school graduates in the U.S. with four-year college scholarships. Almost \$350,000 in scholarships has been awarded to date, to “B” average students (because she was a “B” student herself) who would otherwise not have the financial resources to attend college—most are the first in their families to attend college.

The foundation has also extended its reach to South Africa—a cause that has become a passion of Wilson’s. In 2003, the Wilson Foundation helped establish and build an independent school in the Vaalwater area of South Africa. Dubbed the Waterberg Academy, it is the first independent school of its kind in the area. As a result, other funders have stepped in, helping to expand the primary school buildings and construct a new assembly hall and cafeteria, and a new high school and a boarding facility opened in January of 2007. The Waterberg Academy wasn’t her only focus: the foundation also helped make improvements at other nearby schools.

But Wilson didn’t stop there. In 2006, she created a partnership with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School to send U.S.-trained infectious disease specialists to the Waterberg region to help expand the delivery of healthcare to the children and their families. Through a generous private donation, UT Southwestern provides stipends for physicians to participate in a medical fellowship in the Vaalwater area. The Wilson Foundation provides other program support for the physicians and coordinates with local pediatrician Dr.

Peter Farrant and the staff of the Waterberg Welfare Society. Through the fellowship, these U.S. physicians have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience treating patients with HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, and other diseases, while also delivering expanded medical care for this underserved rural community. “This novel program holds great promise for helping patients in South Africa, while simultaneously enhancing the training and experiences of participating physicians,” says Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, on the foundation’s website.

Now Wilson sits down with NEWH to discuss why she got the charitable bug, the importance of education, and dreaming big.

NEWH: What does giving back mean to you? Why was it important for you to start your organization?

TW: Even though the Wilson Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, it is my personal passion and I feel very committed to helping the foundation continue to expand and serve more people. I believe we all have a responsibility to give back and help others. This is a philosophy I have extended to my company and my employees, and Wilson Associates gives a percentage of our annual revenue to support the operating expenses of the foundation.

NEWH: How were you introduced to the Limpopo Province?

TW: In the early 90s, I was working on the Palace of the Lost City project for Sol Kerzner, so I spent a lot of time in South Africa learning about the country, the customs, and meeting with local artists and craftspeople. I >

fell in love with the area and decided to build my own home in the bush, in the Waterberg mountain region of Limpopo Province. The first thing that appealed to me was that the area reminded me so much of Texas! The topography and climate are similar, and the people are so friendly!

NEWH: What compelled you to help?

TW: My business involves creating the most luxurious and beautiful places on earth, and yet when I am in South Africa, I am reminded of the huge disparity between privilege and poverty in this world. In the U.S. there are hundreds of thousands of nonprofits to address a huge range of human needs. In South Africa, and particularly in the rural area the Wilson Foundation serves, there are very few NGOs (non-governmental organizations). I feel our help there literally means the difference between life and death for those we serve.

NEWH: The Waterberg Academy was the first independent school of its kind in the area. At the same time, in the U.S., you give hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of scholarships to needy teenagers. Why is education so important to you? What do you think it can achieve?

TW: The great leveler in this world is education. I believe that if you have an education, you have a chance to succeed in this world, no matter who

you are, where you come from, or what resources you have. That is why the Wilson Foundation is so committed to helping underprivileged children in rural South Africa have a chance at a quality education. There are so many obstacles for them to overcome yet if they are educated they can learn how to help themselves and in turn, help those around them. The Waterberg Academy serves as a model for schools in the region because it mixes black and white, privileged and poor. These children are learning in an environment where all are equal, which really represents the ideals for the new South Africa.

NEWH: What's next?

TW: Well, I love to dream big! We are looking into opportunities to do more in the area of education here in the U.S. In South Africa, I would love to endow the Waterberg Academy with a fund for teacher salaries and more scholarships for underprivileged children. I would also love to help bring more U.S. doctors to work in the clinic with AIDS patients and help build a larger clinic that can serve the many people who have never even been to see a doctor! The challenges and issues in South Africa are sometimes overwhelming, but I know we are making a difference, and we're doing it as our mission states: "one child at a time." ■

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