

ROUGH NOTES COMPANY PRESENTS 12TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Recipient Chris Paradiso provides creative and passionate support for children's hospital

By Bob Bloss

When The Rough Notes Company inaugurated its annual Community Service Award program more than a decade ago, the sole mission was to remind our readers of the myriad ways independent agents and agencies support their communities with acts of extraordinary service and generosity.

"With our grateful salute to the numerous insurance industry practitioners who have nominated the worthy candidates for this prestigious

honor, the mission's goal is accomplished year after year," says Rough Notes' Community Service Award Director, Robert N. Kretzmer, CIC. "We are gratified with the national response to this popular venture, and for the industry's acceptance of it. But every year there's always a big problem for our selection committee: choosing the one winner from among the dozens of highly qualified nominees is, indeed, quite a challenge!"

Nominees for the Rough Notes Community Service Award are judged on their overall humanitarian contributions. This year's honor was announced in Indianapolis in mid-March during

Rough Notes' annual Marketing Agency of the Year celebration.

"We are proud and delighted to introduce Mr. Christopher Paradiso as the 2011 Community Service Award recipient," Mr. Kretzmer said.

Chris is the owner and president of Paradiso Financial & Insurance Services, LLC in Stafford Springs, Connecticut, which he founded in 2001. Following college graduation in the late 1980s, Chris entered the insurance business with New York Life and eventually expanded into property/casualty insurance and financial needs analysis before opening his own agency.



Upper left, Community Service Award winner Chris Paradiso appears with his daughter, Mia; wife, Mary Alice; son, Gianni; and Alison Auciello, Director of Donor Relations for Connecticut Children's Medical Center, who has just received a check for the proceeds from the inaugural Step Up to the Plate Legends Night fundraiser.



 Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Chris Paradiso, President of Paradiso Financial & Insurance Services, LLC, in Stafford Springs, Connecticut, with The Rough Notes Company Community Service Award.



The Rough Notes Company, Inc.
2011
COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD
PRESENTED TO
Christopher Paradiso
Paradiso Financial & Insurance Services, LLC
CONNECTICUT CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER
OF HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

The designated charity that Chris supports with his time, financial assistance, promotional acumen and unceasing passion is Connecticut Children's Medical Center. As the winner's targeted philanthropy, the medical center was presented a \$5,000 check by Rough Notes in Chris Paradiso's name. And, like previous Community Service Award winners, Chris received a specially designed engraved eagle sculpture.

Connecticut Children's, as it's commonly known, is located in Hartford, some 24 miles from Stafford Springs, a community in northeast Connecticut near the Massachusetts border. That mileage between Stafford Springs and Hartford is a matter of importance in understanding Chris Paradiso's close relationship with Connecticut Children's.

Two years ago Chris and his wife, Mary Alice, were awakened late at night by the sound of crying from the room of their daughter, Mia, then aged one. The little girl's temperature was 104 degrees, and her eyes were swollen shut. Clearly, her condition was critical. Within minutes Chris placed Mia in the family car and sped to Hartford while Mary Alice remained at home with Mia's twin brother, Gianni.

"I knew several good hospitals were closer to our home," says Chris, "but the thought of going anywhere other than Connecticut Children's never crossed my mind. Our little girl was critically ill, and I was confident we'd get there in time." They did.

Physicians at Children's soon got Mia comfortable. But when her condition did not significantly improve, doctors consulted with the Paradiso family pediatrician. He said he had recently prescribed an antibiotic to treat Mia's cold, and he suggested that the emergency room physicians focus on a rare condition known as serum sickness, which is caused by an allergic reaction to antibiotics. Symptoms don't normally appear until seven or more days after the medication is taken.

"The teamwork of Mia's pediatrician and the hospital staff confirmed that serum sickness was, indeed, our daughter's problem," says her father. "Together, they delivered a terrific combination of effort."

Happily, Mia's system steadily stabilized, and in a few days she returned home from the hospital. Now, two years later, Mia Paradiso is a healthy youngster who attends preschool with her twin brother and enjoys activities typically associated with three-year-olds. The Paradisos, understandably, continue to exercise

great caution with Mia. "For example," notes Chris, "she has a spoonful of honey in its raw form daily. And she cannot take any medication whose official name ends in the '...cillin' family - penicillin, amoxicillin, ampicillin, etc."

Chris Paradiso had been aware of Connecticut Children's Medical Center and its state-of-the-art pediatric technology long before that frightening midnight drive to Hartford. But what Chris and Mary Alice would learn over the next few days was the extraordinary lengths to which the staff of Connecticut Children's goes to deliver exceptional "tender loving care" to its young patients and their anxious families.

What Chris experienced during his "up close and personal" interactions there is precisely what inspired him to devote his time, energy, and passion to supporting Connecticut Children's Medical Center. His dedication to that cause, and the positive results generated by his humanitarianism, are largely responsible for the widespread enthusiastic support for Chris Paradiso's nomination for this 12th annual Rough Notes Community Service Award.

Alison Auciello, director of donor relations at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, gratefully cites Chris's ongoing contributions.

"I can't think of a more deserving individual to receive this honor than Chris Paradiso," she says. "We are extremely grateful for all that he's done for Connecticut Children's, and are excited about his plans to partner with us well into the future. Through the donation of his time and financial resources, he is truly an asset to our medical center via his hard work, dedication, and determination."

Auciello outlined some of the special events and important programs that Chris and his agency's associates have spearheaded.

Last year, the first annual Step Up To The Plate Legends Night Dinner at Stafford Motor Speedway attracted more than 300 attendees to mingle with former Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees baseball standouts Bucky Dent, Dennis "Oil Can" Boyd, Bill Lee and Dick McAuliffe. A baseball memorabilia auction and player autograph signings highlighted the event. Public Power, a regional utility company, was a major sponsor. Of the total proceeds, \$4,500 was presented to Connecticut Children's Medical Center. And, demonstrating Chris Paradiso's widespread charitable interests, some of the proceeds benefited a local boosters club.

Another successful project for which Chris assumed significant responsibility was the Wings of Hope Bike Ride at Lime Rock Park Raceway. The event attracted in-kind support that led to raising nearly \$40,000 to support the Medical Center's Cancer Survivorship Program. Chris encouraged clients and other regional businesses to join him in contributing imprinted T-shirts, a cotton candy machine, and two "bouncy houses" for the youngsters in attendance, and supplying refreshments to the cyclists. The T-shirt artwork was designed by a patient at Connecticut Children's.

A record number of recommendations and testimonials for Chris's selection to the Community Service Awards throne were received this year — many of them from Connecticut state and regional elected officials, insurance industry associates, Paradiso clients, fellow Little League coaches, service club leaders, and others. Virtually all of them highlighted Reverse Trick or Treat, Chris's program to bring Halloween fun and treats to kids who were hospitalized at Connecticut Children's.

Realizing that these young patients would be unable to don costumes and go out on their own trick-or-treat adventures, Chris devised a plan to bring gift packages to them — right in their hospital rooms. The program was an overwhelming success. It extended to every youngster in the building, even short-term emergency room patients.

Chris initially brought the idea to the attention of his own agency personnel, to business associates and customers, and to the region's service organizations. His message invited their participation by donating money or items for gift bags containing typical Halloween toys and other "goodies."

In addition, Chris and his team marketed this charitable project even beyond their face-to-face contacts. They used the agency's social networking technology to communicate their mission not only in New England, but throughout the nation. (NOTE: Paradiso Financial & Insurance Services' successful Internet marketing initiative was featured in *Rough Notes Magazine's* August 2009 issue.) When the items, including cash and gift cards, arrived for the Halloween event, the Paradiso staff in Stafford Springs and at its Windham, Connecticut, office carefully assembled over 200 gift bags.

"Many of the Medical Center's youngsters, especially cancer patients, cannot have chocolate," says

Paradiso. "So our gift packets contained activity books, bubbles, silly bands, stickers, and various interactive toys, and were delivered during Halloween weekend. Many substantial contributions arrived from California and from other states far distant from New England.

"That e-mail blast on our agency's digital marketing system was instrumental in attracting that kind of charitable support," explains Chris. "Why not use social media? Get a message out there. Most people want to be helpful in any way they can, and we are convinced that social media is a great technical advance in that area. When you champion a legiti-

mate mission with sincere passion, people find you to be convincing."

Connecticut Children's, as Chris Paradiso eagerly declares, clearly qualifies as a worthy charitable cause for anyone's philanthropy. Other medical centers have highly regarded pediatric units, but the prestigious Connecticut Children's facility, in the state's capital city, is the only stand-alone hospital between Boston and Philadelphia that is devoted entirely to the care of children.

The hospital was founded in 1898 at Newington, Connecticut, just southwest of Hartford. Specialized pediatric medicine as we know it today was then but a distant hope for

the future. The Newington Home For Incurables, established by the Connecticut Children's Aid Society, was the institution's initial name. New construction followed, as did name changes — including Newington Home for Crippled Children in 1917 and Newington Children's Hospital in 1968. The year 1986 was pivotal; that's when Newington Children's Hospital joined with Hartford Hospital to consolidate and start planning the current Washington Street facility. Groundbreaking took place in 1994.

Connecticut Children's Medical Center officially opened on April 2, 1996. Since then, it has saved and helped thousands of children and earned the trust of their grateful families, including Mia Paradiso and her parents.

"In terms of philanthropy," says Chris Paradiso, "Connecticut Children's is my family's first focus, because the hospital is here for the children.

"When we were first there with Mia we saw that some patients don't have their parents there full time. Sometimes other family responsibilities require them to be elsewhere for a while. Often there's no option. I told my wife right then that I was going to do something to help out. That prompted the Reverse Trick or Treat idea, and some of the other things that brighten the children's spirits.

"But the important thing for anyone with a philanthropic nature to remember is this: It's not all about how and what I can give; it's about how many people I can get involved. And take it a step further — how many more supporters can they get to help? Soon you have a whole tracking system — a major component in getting the charitable job done.

"Our agency's social media marketing technology was a key factor in getting some of the Connecticut Children's projects started and completed. A great many individuals and businesses chipped in with donations and hard work. We also did a Facebook video for the hospital. We want to get the message out there so that even more people get to know about Connecticut Children's.

"Whether it's the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, or another charitable effort of one's choice, our obligation is to help people!"

That statement perfectly characterizes Chris Paradiso's strong philanthropic drive and demonstrates how his dedication inspires others. It also shows clearly why Chris is The Rough Notes Company's Community Service Award recipient for 2011. ■

Community Service Award Past winners

2000 Al Singer, Teaneck, New Jersey—initiated People Against Starving Children program.

2001 Dick Lees, Pana, Illinois—promoted funding for local hospital's emergency unit.

2002 Kenneth Felton, Vero Beach, Florida—impetus to develop local Boys & Girls Clubs.

2003 Jack and Jason Rua, Fall River, Massachusetts—raised funds for United Way.

2004 Harry Swimmer, Charlotte, North Carolina—operates therapeutic horseback riding clinic.

2005 Jim McGovern, Belmont, California—Leukemia & Lymphoma Society program organizer.

2006 J. Douglas Reichart, W. Des Moines, Iowa—chaired local United Way fundraising.

2007 Co-Winner Markham Rollins, Rye Brook, New York—Bridges to Community (poverty victim housing in Nicaragua).

2007 Co-Winner Mark Williamson, Little Rock, Arkansas—Radiation Therapy Institute fundraising.

2008 D. Gaines Lanier, West Point, Georgia—poverty housing reconstruction and Brain Tumor Foundation for Children fundraiser and supporter.

2009 Barbara Galgiani, Modesto, California—hospice creation and support.

2010 Craig Moon, Middletown, Ohio—creation and development of an adult autism community living facility.