



Walt Disney: Turning Magic into Good Deeds

BY JEFF HOFFMAN

Walt Disney has been called many things—showman, storyteller, magician, artist—but we don't often enough hear the similarly suitable title of "philanthropist." With the same creative vision and passion that he used to make movies and build Disneyland, Walt added the element of compassion to help children in need and the environment. Long before the expectation of "good corporate citizenship" that has become so typical today, Walt felt that his philanthropy was a natural extension of who he was personally, and of the company that bore his name.

Some of Walt's earliest charity work (and probably the Studio's first volunteer project) involved Children's

Hospital Los Angeles, located near the Hyperion Studio (and even closer to the Kingswell Avenue office). The historic teaching hospital provided a nearby opportunity for Walt to bring in his artists and animators to draw pictures for the children on the hospital wards. These first "VoluntEARS" made regular visits from the late twenties through the thirties. Walt knew the power of entertainment in helping children heal, and these early efforts led to a long history of helping hospitals.

Three years after the Studio moved into its new Burbank plant, Walt was across Buena Vista Street, helping with the groundbreaking of St. Joseph's Hospital in 1943. He again had shovel in hand for

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the groundbreaking of their new wing in 1950, and was patron to beloved Disney artist Mary Blair in the creation of a mural for the St. Joseph's Nursery.

Another long tradition that Walt initiated was a Christmas Party for the young hospital patients, as well as for the children of hospital employees. Talented staff from the Studio would put on a show for the children, complete with toys and a special visit from Santa Claus. Candy Candido, voice talent for several Disney films, produced the show for many years.

When Disneyland opened, and his sights moved towards Orange County, Walt again stepped up to help. In early 1960, Walt joined a group of more than 50 civic leaders from Orange County, including Walter Knott, to raise the funds necessary to build Orange County's first dedicated children's hospital. Known as CHOC (Children's Hospital of Orange County), Walt asked one of his advertising artists, Disney Legend Bob Moore, to create its logo and mascot. CHOCO the Bear is still used today—and beloved by the patients.

Walt's concern for children was not limited to those in hospitals. Toys for Tots, Big Brothers, and Boys Clubs are just a few of the organizations that he and the Studio supported.

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WALT DISNEY

In 1948, the United States Marine Corps adopted Toys for Tots and made it their national community program. That same year, Walt was asked to supervise the design of the famous toy train logo, which is still used today. In 1955, while working to open Disneyland, he and a group of community leaders established Big Brothers of Greater Los Angeles (now Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Los Angeles). For his efforts, Walt was named Honorary Founder.

"Eleven months prior to the opening of the [1964 New York World's] Fair, Robert Moses, with representatives from the United Nations Children's Fund in tow, visited WED in Glendale," says retired Walt Disney Imagineering Ambassador Marty Sklar. "Walt and the Imagineers showed them the work being done for the three pavilions. The UNICEF reps were excited. Moses asked Walt to create 'a salute to the children of the world.'" Walt Disney's "It's a Small World—a salute to UNICEF" was a huge success at the Fair, and then was brought to Disneyland in 1966. This led to Walt's (and the company's) longstanding relationship with UNICEF.

"Having spent most of my life creating material for children and observing their potential, I feel convinced that a full-time education for our youth is our best investment in the future," Walt said. In 1951, he and his brother Roy started what is now The Walt Disney Company Foundation, with the primary purpose of supporting education. Not only does the Foundation support



education externally, it also provides college scholarships to children of Disney employees.

One of Walt's most revered achievements is the creation of the California Institute of the Arts. He had long been a champion of training for his staff to make them better artists, and as a result, he frequently brought in instructors and developed a long-standing relationship with the Chouinard Art Institute. "Walt saw that all the arts are related," Sklar recalls. "He wanted to create a place where young artists in many fields could work and learn together. CalArts today has 1,400 cross-disciplinary students—music, dance, theatre, art, film and animation, and critical studies/writing. CalArts is one of Walt's greatest legacies."

"When we talk about Disney magic, we aren't just talking about entertainment magic, we are also talking about the kind of magic you do...the kind of magic that lifts up lives and restores health, that gives neglected kids a role model or puts food on the table of a family in need," said Roy E. Disney at the 2002 Disneyland Resort Community

Service Awards. "But, when it comes to the magic of charity, most of our efforts are in a supporting role. You are the ones who are on the front lines, delivering services and making a positive difference in countless lives."

This comment captures the spirit of Walt Disney's giving throughout his life. His own passion about children and the environment, his ability to infuse his staff with the same enthusiasm, and how his magic could be translated by countless organizations around the world to make our "small world" a world of laughter and a world of hope.

JEFF HOFFMAN IS A FORMER DISNEY EXECUTIVE. HIS CORPORATE ROLE INCLUDED PHILANTHROPY, COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND DISNEY VOLUNTEERS. HE ALSO HEADED THE DISNEY LEGENDS PROGRAM. TODAY, HE HEADS HIS OWN PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMPANY, JEFF HOFFMAN & ASSOCIATES.

Left page, right: Walt promotes the Toys for Tots campaign for the 18th year in 1966. Courtesy of The Walt Disney Company.

Left page, left: Walt's close friendship with Spencer Tracy resulted in support for the John Tracy Clinic. Courtesy of The Walt Disney Company.

Above: Walt was an early supporter of the Music Center of Los Angeles County, now the location of The Walt Disney Concert Hall. Courtesy of The Walt Disney Company.