

**CMN CHAMPIONS
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JOE DURRETT SPEECH

Thank you, Marie. You know, I still melt every time I see that smile of hers. And to know what kind of champion stands behind it makes me very proud, indeed, to serve with her on the Board of Governors of CMN Champions.

I don't need to tell you how important the ability to smile is -- and to laugh. Can you imagine what it would be like not to be able to smile?

I recently heard a delightful story, from a book entitled, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," by David Saltzmann, which tells of a Jester, who performed for the King one day and discovered that everyone in the King's court had quit laughing. This is not good for job security, if you're a Jester. Well, the King soon banished him out into the world, where the Jester discovered nobody was laughing. Try as he might, he could not make anyone laugh. They were too busy, or too "important," or too afraid and depressed. And just when he was so discouraged that he was about to give up his honored calling of Jester, he met a little girl in a hospital bed. She didn't have very much to smile about, because she had a condition that made it so she couldn't go out and do the things that kids are supposed to be able to do. In fact, if something wasn't done, she wouldn't even get the chance to become a grownup. This made the Jester even more sad. If only he still had the ability to make people laugh. He decided to try one more time. So he did his very best: he juggled, he tumbled, he sang funny songs, and had imaginary conversations with his hand-puppet, Pharley. And then, he saw a twinkle in the little girl's eye and she started to laugh. Then she laughed harder. And the laughter was more contagious than the disease in her body. Pretty soon, the hospital staff caught it and they were laughing right along with her, And the sound drifted out the window of her hospital room where it was heard by the businessman, and the policeman and the construction worker and the mothers with their own little children, reminding them of how great it is to laugh and smile. Pretty soon, everyone was laughing again, and the little girl's condition started to improve. Everyone was healthier, and the Jester carried rainbows of laughter back to his own kingdom, where the King gladly -- and laughingly -- gave him his old job back.

What must it be like to hurt so badly that you don't even care if you never smile, or laugh, again? Some of the kids we treat at CMN- participating hospitals come to us that way. It's heartbreaking; but it's not hopeless. Year after year, new pieces to the puzzle of life and health are discovered, and CMN Champions is at the forefront to find innovative and ethical means of applying those discoveries on behalf of children. We have made great strides, but there is still so far to go: until every single child we admit can leave the hospital with a smile on his or her face, and a fair shot at life, our job will not be done. And champions do not quit.

Our Board of Governors is made-up of champions. These people -- from all types of business, hospitals, TV stations, sports and entertainment -- these

men and women devote an enormous amount of time seeing that the mission of CMN Champions -- "to generate funds and awareness programs to benefit children and affiliated hospitals" -- is carried to companies far and near; companies whose decision-makers have the foresight to see what is really good for their business, and both the compassion and the capital to do something about it. Our board members are the heavy-hitters who, year-after-year, step-up to the plate and score the sponsorship homeruns that literally make us what we are: the largest annual television fundraiser and the dominant children's health organization in North America.

Let me ask you something. What is it about CMN Champions that draws so many top people from all walks of life, to strive so valiantly to make a real difference; rather than just paying lip-service and a little cash, and then getting back to business; forgetting the real meaning of their donation? Is it because we better understand cause-related marketing and its applications in today's business climate? Is it because all the donations raise in a community stay within that community at the local children's hospital? Is it because they want Steve Young's autograph? Well yes... But in truth, it is the children who draw-out the champion in them; who inspire these heavy-hitters to become CMN Champions. And thanks to these champions, last year's broadcast put us over the one billion dollar cumulative total; money that has gone toward primary care and research that has saved countless children's lives and will save even more as we continue. I salute them, and I salute you.

As the Cone/Roper study we mentioned in the past points-out: in the 80's and before, consumers aspired to brands; in the 90's, brands must aspire to the values of the consumer. Today's consumer has both the awareness and the opportunity to deal with companies which reflect their strongest values (and avoid those that don't). From global environmental issues to personal leisure time activities, consumers are buying products and supporting companies whose goods and services stand for something more than the profit motive; something deeper and more far-reaching. One of the greatest values held within the hearts of all is the desire to protect our children from whatever threatens them; and to provide care and healing to those who are already victims of disease, accident or abuse. The survey also showed that consumers believe that business has a responsibility to help improve social ills, and they support businesses who demonstrate a long-term commitment to doing so. Many consumers even seem willing to pay more when a good cause is involved!

This is the message our board members carry to the businesses and organizations they visit during the course of the year: contributing to and affiliating with CMN Champions is not only doing good and making a difference, it's good for business, too; and that's okay, because when a consumer sees a long-term commitment from a company supporting a hospital their own child or someone close to them will very likely have to visit at some time... sure, he or she might assume the company is doing it to increase business, but they also look kindly on the company for putting it's money back into society in positive ways. And that goodwill ultimately manifests itself as a healthier and more abundant society -- truly a win-win situation.

Behind each smiling child we release into loving arms, those of us here, better than anyone else, know just how much serious thought and effort helps get them to that moment. For some, health professionals and others, it takes long years of study, preparation and practice. For station owners and corporate leaders, it takes vision to spot trends before they happen and target the effects of those trends. For still others, it takes training and sacrifice and often pain to reach that top physical condition which has helped you achieve celebrity status.

It's time to hit the line again: hit it harder; hit it smarter. Our mission has not changed. Through our sports emphasis, our horizons continue to broaden; our move to Walt Disney World is like a crucial pass in football: there is a risk, but the rewards far outweigh it; especially as we acknowledge that this is not a game we play, for if it were, each point would be measured in a child's life. Children are not mere points. Each life is sacred. And each life deserves our best efforts.

As ever, our CMN Champion board members are networking with friends and new acquaintances that will ultimately bring about exciting new associations involving cooperative events and creatively unique sponsorships. But it is not just the board members, or the tv stations, or the corporate leaders, or the celebrities, or even the children's hospitals themselves, though we thank each of you individually. It is all of us: Champions, working in synergy with one another, which bring those smiles from the land of make-believe into reality. We are very proud to be Champions in the cause of healthy -- and smiling -- children.

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