

A Habit of Charity

Sister Rosemary Connelly serves Chicago's developmentally challenged with grace.

BY MICHAEL B. DOUGHERTY

THERE IS PERHAPS no more humbling experience than talking to Sister Rosemary Connelly. A member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy order for the past 60 years, the native Chicagoan has literally dedicated her entire life to service, specifically as the executive director of Misericordia Heart of Mercy Home, a residential facility for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

Connelly is celebrating her 40th anniversary in that role, for which she will be fêted on August 30 at the Palmer House Hilton hotel. She says she "came from a family where religious service was highly valued," entering into it at the age of 18. In 1969 the Sisters of Mercy, who have a long relationship with Misericordia, invited Connelly to the original site at West 47th Street. This was at a time when people with disabilities were commonly institutionalized.

"At that time we had 132 little children under the age of six, and 69 of them were Down syndrome children," Connelly says. "Today, to show the progress made in the field, we have no children with Down syndrome. They're staying at home where they belong." (People with Down syndrome come to Misericordia as adults.)

When a shift in state policy in the '70s brought about the closing of local orphanages, Connelly and Misericordia stepped in to create a caring environment for children with developmental disabilities; by 1976, Misericordia had opened its North Campus, and thus was born the modern incarnation of Misericordia, a live-in facility with a full range of care for both adults and children. "That probably makes us unique in Chicago, and the state of Illinois," says Connelly. She says her experience has taught her "not to look for answers," but adds, "We definitely need answering people in order to help us keep Misericordia

the beautiful environment that it is."

And while Sister Connelly likes to emphasize that the August 30 event is a fundraiser over her own spotlight that evening, when pressed she does acknowledge her achievement, in her own way. "I think the overwhelming sense is one of gratitude to God, that I had this opportunity and continue to have the opportunity to make a difference in his most vulnerable people's lives."

Because the Palmer House is generously underwriting the event, all of the proceeds from the anniversary celebration will help Misericordia expand its services for children and adults with developmental disabilities. Tickets are \$125 per person. *For more information, contact Lois Gates at 773-273-4160.*

Power Do-Gooder



Power Charity

Connect for a Cause

Chicago-based website actofgood.org makes giving back easier than ever.

BY ENA BRDJANOVIC

SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES

have made communication instant, seamless and sometimes annoyingly incessant, but what if they were used for more than socializing and photo sharing? Cue actofgood.org, a new networking site intended to connect charities with interested volunteers and donors.

Launched in April 2009 by Chicagoans Michael Farah and David Ruttenberg, Act of Good utilizes an online platform to connect people to the causes they support.

The website features more 80 charitable organizations (including the Anixter Center and Special Olympics Chicago), each of which is screened to ensure validity. Each cause has its own information page, and the site's several thousand registered members can join and become involved with as many causes as they like. Registration is free for both charities and individuals.

Act of Good provides a forum for charities to instantly share information about their cause and volunteering opportunities with users. A key feature of the site is the three-tiered calendar system that integrates users' favorite charities' events into their personal calendars, simplifying the process of getting and staying involved. "Previously, many charitable organizations were limited to communicating with their member base via mail, e-mail or phone. Now communication between charities and their members is much more facilitated and interactive," says Daniella Farber Schwartz, Act of Good's vice president of marketing and charity relations.

Act of Good hopes to expand nationwide and eventually to encompass global organizations and initiatives. "Starting with Chicago, we have the capability to strengthen connections between charitable organizations and their community," Ruttenberg says. A good idea for an even better cause.

