

Star Power

Stephanie Sandler '88 is helping the rich and famous give back

Stephanie Sandler's office buzzes with names like Sting, Leonardo DiCaprio, Britney Spears and Magic Johnson. But she's not a publicist, agent or manager. Sandler '88 is chief executive officer of the Giving Back Fund (GBF), a national nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles.

GBF's mission is to cultivate the philanthropic interests of celebrities and professional athletes, whom the organization sees as a promising and exciting new group of philanthropists. One of GBF's most successful projects was helping to start the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism.

Sandler works directly with the athletes and celebrities. "I nurture their philanthropic instinct. I guide them and try to help increase their involvement and get them jazzed up about philanthropy." She explains, "Sometimes someone will come to me and say, 'I really want to help kids,' but that's really all they know." Sandler walks them through issues like how much money they want to donate and just how much time their involvement might require. "I have to get to know them, talk about what their experiences are, what's motivating them to give back, so that I can figure out how to help them have an impact."

One project Sandler personally directed was a 2005 celebrity calendar called "12 Reasons to Give," which featured people like Angelina Jolie and

Rosie O'Donnell. "The idea behind the calendar was to create philanthropic role models, not only for the public but for the honorees' peers." The project was such a success she is producing another calendar for 2007. This edition features singers Alanis Morissette, Bonnie Raitt, Céline Dion, professional skater Tony Hawk, NASCAR's Tony Stewart, pro golf's Gary Player and baseball's Cal Ripken Jr.

Sandler has also been working closely with actress Jamie-Lynn DiScala, who plays Meadow Soprano on HBO's *The Sopranos*. Sandler has enabled DiScala to found a nonprofit to help young women with eating disorders. Part of her work includes helping to put together a compilation CD of young women performers singing about their life experiences, "taking the listener from hard times to triumph." The CD is scheduled to be offered free in *CosmoGirl!* magazine in 2006. GBF also worked with the DiScala Foundation to produce an awareness bracelet, available in Claire's boutiques nationwide.

Sandler is now at work on a 2006 Los Angeles event called "Play with the Pros," which will enable the public to play on the field with their favorite professional athletes. The event will raise funds but will also honor "the people who have really changed the face of sports with their commitment to philanthropy," she says.

But the Giving Back Fund is special, different from other nonprofits that work with celebrities, Sandler believes. "We're really focused on getting innovative programs that motivate the celebrity to give back time, talent *and* their own money." GBF, she explains,



Photo by Christiane Ingenthron

is working to counteract "a real culture in entertainment and sports in which showing up is enough. We are trying to change the culture a bit."

There are signs GBF is having an impact, Sandler asserts. "Several of the honorees for the 2006 calendar actually contacted us and said, 'We want to be in the calendar, we love what you're doing.' So that's a big step for us." She adds, "I do hope things are changing. There's more of an expectation from the public that celebrities are going to use their exposure for the common good."

— Christopher Hennessy