



Woodstock woman blends her business, charity work

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By Vicky Wedig

Woodstock- Susan Eyre's role as the recently-elected board chairman for the Heifer International Foundation will mean less time for the family's nursery business.

But then again, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two.

Eyre estimated she, her husband, Rich, and mother-in-law Margaret, spend about 20 hours a week working for the nonprofit group. The foundation is the charitable arm for Heifer Project International, which provides food and income-producing animals and training to impoverished families worldwide.

The Woodstock nursery, Rich's Foxwillow Pines, is intimately connected with the organization.

The Eyres donate the proceeds from hosta and perennial plant sales to the project.

"That is the part of our business we have chosen to give 100 percent to charity," Eyre said. "You can take a hosta apart, divide it in half and put it back in the ground, and you have just as many. It is a renewable resource. It is like passing on the gift."

The concept of the Heifer Project is to help poor people through sustainable animal projects. What makes the project especially unique is its requirement that those who receive a gift, give a gift in return.

"If someone receives an animal, they have to give its first female offspring to a neighbor," Eyre said. "So if you have to give to another family what you've got."

That is why Eyre believes in the project.

"You give money once to this organization but the effects keep on going," she said.

Rosemary Larson, director of the Chicago office of Heifer Project International, said the board selected 51-year old Eyre because of her even-keeled personality and her commitment.

"She's been active in the Chicagoland area for over 10 years," Larson said.

Larson said Susan and Rich Eyre are the Chicago office's largest donors. They helped raise \$36,000 for the organization last year. At the Chicago Flower and Garden Show in March, the sale of miniature conifers alone raised \$10,500.

"They generate a great deal of interest among their customers," Larson said.

Susan and Rich Eyre served as trustees of the group for three years and raised funds for the organization through plant sales.

"Rich was introduced to Heifer Project 30 years ago in the Peace Corps in Bolivia," Susan Eyre said.

The purpose of Heifer international Foundation is to build an endowment so the interest can support Heifer Project International. The foundation now has \$31 million with a goal of \$100 million by 2010. The endowment is built through wills, bequeaths and trusts given to the foundation.

Susan Eyre's job will be to run the board of trustees' twice-yearly meetings, promote the Heifer Project and encourage people to will money to the foundation. Her position as foundation chairman also puts her on the group's board of directors.

"When you're called to serve in an organization like this, you say yes," she said. "The mission is fantastic and the result is phenomenal."

The group helps determine how money is spent. The organization collects \$28 million a year. About half of it goes to African countries, a quarter to Asian countries and a quarter to South America.

There are some American projects, including about five in Chicago and one in Milwaukee. The Eyres already donated trees to areas in south suburban Lawndale.

"We have a Third World right down in Chicago," Susan Eyre said.

The couple recently returned from Kentucky's Appalachian Mountains.

"Here we're worried the Square is dead. There, agri-business is putting little farmers out of business," Susan Eyre said. "The small farmers are really struggling in America. These particular farmers, their biggest cash crop is tobacco. They're on the brink of ruin."

The benefits are apparent even more in countries like Honduras and India where the Eyres traveled for the organization.

"In India, the competition between the people is fierce," Susan Eyre, said. "The problems seem hopeless until you see a village with the Heifer Project."

A few chickens, a goat, a little seed can make all the difference. It builds self-confidence, self-esteem.

"The greatest thing about this program is it is community-based and people figure it out themselves," Susan Eyre said. "If it doesn't generate from them, it's not as effective."

Address donations to: Heifer Project International, Rosemary Larson, 2916 W. Belmont Ave. Chicago, 60618. For information call: (773) 279-9022.