

7 Spectacular! PLACES THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE IN 2013

Wheaton/Glen Ellyn.... *At a Glance*

# Glancer™

M A G A Z I N E

2013  
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IN TOWN  
HOLIDAY  
EVENTS

LITERARY LOCAL  
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15

Fascinating Faces  
of the Year

**December 2013**

Vol 12 / Issue 80

Wheaton/Glen Ellyn Area

A West Suburban Focus

Featuring Your Community

# 15

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Unless Otherwise Submitted

## Fascinating Faces of the Year

### Sara Reifsteck, Founder of BounceBack

Let's face it: life is expensive, especially with kids in sports. "I started to see the cost that we would incur each year with three boys in sports and it had me wondering, 'How do all these parents do it?'" Sara said. The Naperville mom began to hear from other families that they may have to pull their child from the sport due to the cost and started to think, "It would just crush my son if I had to pull him out due to finances." That's when Sara founded BounceBack ([www.bouncebackinc.org](http://www.bouncebackinc.org)) to help take the economic pressure off families so that all children have the opportunity to pursue their passion. "BounceBack is here to alleviate that financial burden and is 100% private," Sara says. "I have to say that the families we have assisted so far have been wonderful; hard workers; amazing parents; and set pride aside to make sure they don't have to say NO but now they can say YES." BounceBack believes children gain so much from sports. They learn to think on their feet, dedication, and teamwork. As a TAG dealer, BounceBack also provides families with a discount on equipment as well.



### Madison Langley, Miss Illinois Teen America 2013

After entering her very first pageant this past spring, Madison Langley of Naperville earned the title of Miss Illinois Teen America 2013 and advanced to the national pageant in Florida where she placed in the top ten at Miss Teen America. Given her age of 17, this is the last year she will be eligible for the teen division so she decided to compete for the title of Miss Illinois Teen USA 2014. "It would be an amazing honor to be able to catch a larger audience while raising awareness for children with special needs," Madison says. "I have always been passionate about children with special needs and watching these kids learn and grow has been especially rewarding for me." Madison is involved in Peer Partners at Waubonsie Valley High School and always enjoys playing games and sports with the special needs children of the district. "I would recommend it to anyone! You won't regret it!" Living by her great grandma Alice's words, "You're as good as everyone, but no better than anyone," Madison hopes to raise awareness of total inclusion and thinks the pageant platform is the venue to capture a large group of listeners. She is raising money for her pageant journey at [www.gofundme.com/4fmpo07](http://www.gofundme.com/4fmpo07)



### Rebecca Steele, U.S. Presidential Scholar Semifinalist

Rebecca Steele of Naperville made carrying her 4.58/4.00 GPA easy. She has been in Project Arrow (PA) since the 2nd grade and has taken her educational journey to Purdue University to pursue a bachelor of science in biology, genetics. Over the years her academic accolades include National Merit Finalist, a perfect ACT score, AP Scholar with Distinction, selected to present the academic senior speech at Waubonsie Valley High School (WVHS) Class of 2013 graduation ceremony, WVHS PTA scholarship award, Indian Prairie Scholar, John Philip Sousa band award and scholarship, WVHS Outstanding Senior – AP biology, Illinois State Scholar, and the list goes on. This ambitious young lady was also selected as a U.S. Presidential Scholar Semifinalist, an award only bestowed upon 550 students across the U.S. "My teachers' recommendations highlighted my willingness to participate in class, help other students, and contribute to daily discussion," Rebecca shares. Rebecca has shown that life is about balance and beyond academics she was heavily involved in the music department and student council at WVHS, as well as karate and church youth groups outside of school. "Whatever I am interested in or choose to become involved in, I want to put everything I can into it," Rebecca says. "I never want to do anything half-way."



## Michelle Dacy, Founder of Special Needs Chicago

Although Michelle Dacy of Wheaton had been coordinating transportation for Chicagoland special needs people for over ten years, it wasn't until her own young daughter developed tics and gross motor skill challenges that she felt compelled to prioritize customer service and streamline the red tape. Taking the bull by the horn, Michelle opened Special Needs Chicago, a transportation company based in Wheaton for physically and cognitively challenged individuals. As a private transportation company, Michelle has unlimited potential: "We can take people with mobility or cognitive challenges anywhere they want; we don't have restrictions governing geography, timing, and reason for transport," she passionately shares. "We provide transportation for people to go to medical appointments, business meetings, the airport, camp, family gatherings - anywhere someone needs to go we will take them, even if they need to travel to Champaign or Michigan." Her greatest accomplishment is the complete circle she has created with her family and her company by coordinating transportation for a one-week summer camp for children with mobility challenges ([www.campschwab.org](http://www.campschwab.org)). "This year I was able to bring my kids with and we volunteered every day; I was so proud of Zachary and Natalie," Michelle says. "That week was my biggest accomplishment, both personally and professionally."



## Shea Mahoney, Junior Olympics Gold Medalist

Taking home the gold medal in floor exercise at the Junior Olympics national championships helped launch 15-year-old Shea Mahoney to the United States Junior Olympics national team. A sophomore at St. Francis in Wheaton, Shea knows the true meaning of hard work, dedication, and discipline, yet you can still find her teaming with friends against her little brother in an epic Nerf war. "Our family motto is Work Hard and Have Fun," she says. "I also love the quote from Mia Hamm, I've worked too hard and too long to let anything stand in the way of my goals. I will not let my teammates or myself down." Shea has been doing gymnastics for eleven years and trains 28-30 hours each week, but honors a day of rest on Sundays to reconnect with God. Her Junior Olympics national team status allows her to participate in training camps at the U.S. Olympic training site in Texas with top U.S. national team coaches. "It is an incredible experience and also an honor to receive the USA team leotard and warm-ups," she says. Shea will continue her gymnastics journey at the University of Alabama in 2016, where she will study in the healthcare field.



## Mary Dabrowski, Crusader Against Breast Cancer

Mary was on a successful journey of working out and eating healthy when the unforeseen happened. The Glen Ellyn resident was diagnosed with stage 1 invasive ductal carcinoma (ERPR+ and HER2-), or in laymen's terms - breast cancer. She was 45 years old, married with four children, and had no family history of breast cancer. Mary also maintained yearly mammograms. She was shocked and unaccepting of the news. As most moms would say, "I just didn't have time to go through this journey." But somehow she managed to maintain a regular daily life while enduring a lumpectomy surgery, four rounds of chemo, and 19 rounds of radiation. "I still worked out twice a week from home thanks to Pam Strand (Strand Fitness/Wheaton), who was gracious to come to my house," Mary says. "This kept me strong and motivated to keep up with my 'summer project' - which is what I called my cancer journey." After treatments and a successful completion of her "summer project," Mary felt incredibly grateful. "It was humbling how everyone wanted to contribute; I wanted to give back." She formed a team from Strand Fitness called "Girls Who Curl" and raised \$11,700 for the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer.



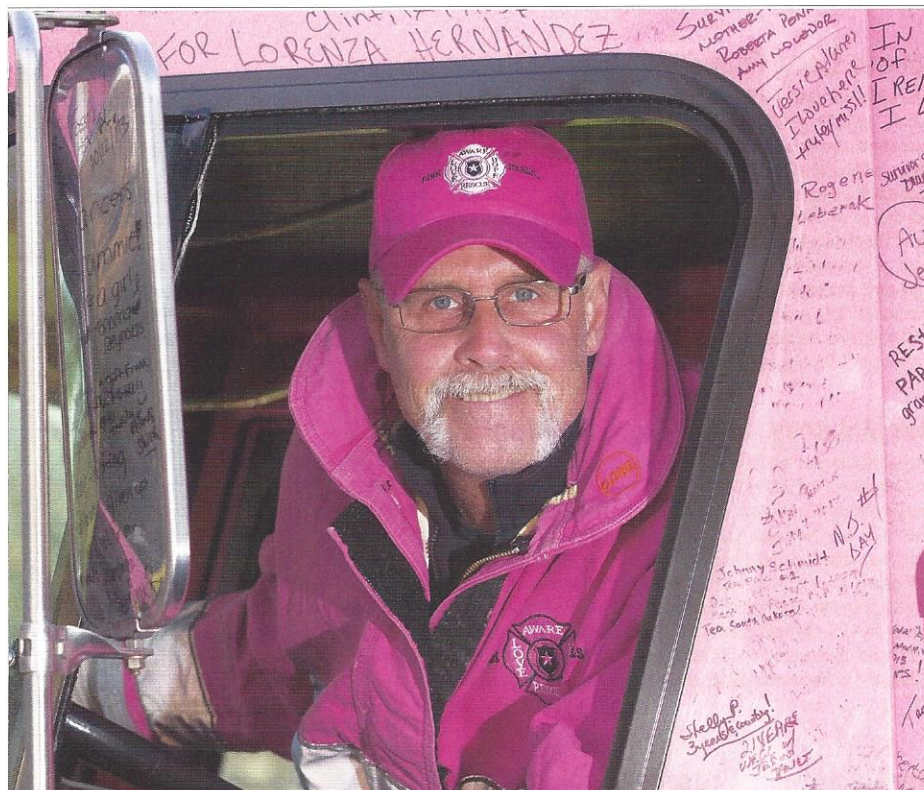
## Barbara Rozgonyi Svoboda, Reporter for Social Media Week Berlin

How do you attract attention, build a brand, and click with communities? Through social media, of course! It's all the rage these days but just a few years ago when it was just emerging, Barbara of Glen Ellyn, a married mother of three, took advantage of the opportunity and began publishing a top-50 PR blog at [wiredPRworks.com](http://wiredPRworks.com). As the founder of CoryWest Media, which motivates action in organizations, her company is redefining PR as Personality + Reputation. "I've always been interested in the intersection of technology, marketing, and communications," Barbara says. At BlogWorld in Las Vegas in 2008, she met the co-founder of Social Media Club (SMC) global and was encouraged to start a Chicago chapter. In true entrepreneurial spirit, Barbara did just that. The SMC Chicago now has over 8,700 social media connections. This fall, Barbara won Nokia's contest to be a reporter at Social Media Week Berlin. As one of two U.S. reporters, Barbara shared photos, news, and education via Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. "Blogging takes time, but it anchors everything you do," she says. "It's kind of like having a headquarters for all your social media!" Connect with Barbara online at <http://about.me/barbara.rozgonyi>



## Georgia Dudley, Founder of Empowering Women Network (EWN)

A curious leader by nature, Georgia Dudley of Glen Ellyn continues to research the complex reasons why professional women are not advancing as quickly as their male counterparts. Out of her desire to help professional women progress in their careers and develop their leadership abilities, she established Empowering Women Network, Inc. (EWN) and is committed to the advancement of professional women. With the support and active participation of top female executives from RR Donnelley, Navistar, PepsiCo, Walgreens, and True Value, Georgia now has over 900 members from both the corporate and entrepreneurial sector. "I created an environment where professional women could feel safe to talk, support each other, and build their leadership skills," Georgia says. "EWN's services support that philosophy through leadership development programs, membership, and executive mentoring programs." To date, over 200 women have successfully graduated from the leadership development program and have gone on to advance in their careers. "I am a person who loves to help others succeed and my biggest hope is that more women are placed in leadership roles in companies, not-for-profits, and government," she adds. As a mother, grandmother, and businesswoman, Georgia's ultimate dream is to continue doing what she's doing. "I love it!"



### Joel Mains, Founder of Pink Heals Chicagoland

He leads by example and often also by wearing pink. Joel Mains, a Downers Grove firefighter/paramedic and self-professed nurturer by nature, has founded Pink Heals Chicagoland. "Joel is a guy that makes any situation better. He is a person that can bring the best out of those around him by his actions and words," said fellow Downers Grove firefighter/paramedic Nick Gilbert. "He is a true leader. Joel is a game changer in the firehouse and in the community." Pink Heals Tour was first launched in Arizona in 2007. Since then, chapters have formed across the country, raising money for local cancer initiatives. Furthermore, pink fire trucks, driven by retired and off-duty firemen dressed in pink gear, visit women with cancer, delivering roses, hugs, and moral support. "Women are the most selfless creatures on the planet. This is an opportunity for us as men to give back to the women in the world and the women in our lives. To show them that they're loved and important to us and we want to take care of them," said Mains. He spends much of his vacation time traveling with Pink Heals and earlier this year decided to form the local chapter. In November, Pink Heals Chicagoland welcomed Leslie, the pink fire truck from the national tour, to her new area home.



### Jim Elliott, Full-Time Volunteer for Diveheart

Ashley Hoffman, a young woman who is blind and has cerebral palsy, said that scuba diving affords her the opportunity to feel freed from a body in which she otherwise feels trapped. "Land doesn't treat me so kindly," she said. The water is a different story, offering her mobility, freedom, and a sense of adventure. Hoffman is one of hundreds of individuals whose lives have been dramatically impacted by Diveheart of Downers Grove. Jim Elliott is a full-time volunteer for Diveheart, the not-for-profit organization that he founded in 2001. Diveheart provides scuba diving opportunities for individuals with disabilities and wounded veterans around the world. The physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of scuba diving are beyond measure. "This is the only sport in the world that has no gravity, along with all of the benefits that come with that. Our divers with disabilities find that they can move body parts that they've never been able to move before. Range of motion improves, circulation improves. The pressure aspect of diving benefits people with autism. People with spinal cord injuries have reported that after scuba diving, they've been pain free. The self-confidence and independence achieved by participating in such a great sport is tremendous. People feel if they can scuba dive, they can do anything," Elliott said.

Photo Credit: Taylor Castle



### Jen and Tracy VanHoutan, Creators of Noah's Hope Fund

Jen and Tracy VanHoutan have experienced every parent's worst nightmare. Twice. Two of their three children were diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder called Batten disease/late infantile neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis. Noah, who is now nine, and Laine, who is now seven, both developed seemingly normally during their early years. This path took a dramatic reverse course as the disease began to progress. Batten disease causes mental impairment, seizures, and the loss of sight, mobility, and the ability to communicate. There is no cure and little ongoing research. Children with the type of Batten disease that Noah and Laine have typically die between the ages of 8 and 12. Laine's twin, Emily, does not have the disease. Jen and Tracy have successfully established an amazing balance in their lives. They created Noah's Hope Fund to support medical research and increase awareness about the disease, have collaborated with international research studies, and lobbied Congress. Simultaneously, the couple works feverishly to create a lifetime of wonderful experiences and memories for their family in what will be a tragically shortened time frame. The VanHoutans serve as role models of grace, dignity, and dedication to what is truly important in life, while reminding us of how fleeting that life often is.

Photo Credit: Amy Goray Photography



### Anne Wagner, Downers Grove North Homecoming Queen

"She fit the role of an actual homecoming queen perfectly: strong, beautiful, and someone everyone can respect," said Mary Doro, a senior at Downers Grove North High School. Mary's ideal homecoming queen candidate, who was ultimately and overwhelmingly elected, was her friend since kindergarten, Anne Wagner. The 19-year-old, who has Down syndrome, returned to school for her senior year this fall after having missed much of her sophomore and junior years because of her battle with leukemia. Anne's mother, Amy, describes her daughter as "funny and very sassy but the sweetest little thing." Wagner added that Anne, who is her "hero," is also "stubborn and a fighter"; traits that she said helped her daughter get through intensive chemotherapy and surgery, and the numerous devastating complications. Wagner said that Anne's strong spirit also helped her return to school this year on her own two feet. "She lost a lot of muscle tone and atrophied significantly. The fact that she's doing what she is right now is a miracle," she said. "She didn't do physical therapy. It's just her own spirit. What she's doing is incredible." As deserving as Anne was to be honored as homecoming queen, Wagner said that the students at DGN are also remarkable. "This is such a memory that we will all always treasure. They're an amazing group of kids."

## Deb Cargola, The All American Mom

This mom of three is a triple threat - she's a nurse by day, an exuberant Jazzercise instructor by night, and a handy do-it-yourselfer in between!

"I grew up outside of Ottawa on a working farm," says Deb Cargola, a 13-year Sugar Grove resident. "We grew corn and beans, I learned how to sew, and I showed cattle in 4H." Working two days a week in pre-op at a Naperville surgery center as a nurse fulfills Deb's more structured, left-brain side. Teaching Jazzercise accesses her fun side (she is a self-proclaimed "goofball" and has a loyal following) and fortifies her with non-stop energy. But her creativity is what really seems to spark her - most recent developments include turning her craftiness into a lucrative side career!

"I wanted a bag for all of my Jazzercise stuff," says Deb. "Nothing fancy but I wanted something cute, so I created one using burlap coffee sacks I wanted to use but didn't know how. Then I added a bright fabric liner and used one of my kids' belts as the strap." Currently, Deb has made over 40 and is selling them to family and friends; however, Relux Vintage in Geneva will be carrying them soon!



## Chris & Julie Walker, Giving Back to the Senior Community

The last Tuesday of every month, a good portion of Sugar Grove's senior population can be found happily congregating in one place - Senior Lunch!

That lunch is the brainchild of Chris Walker, who with many years of senior living work experience under his belt, volunteered with the Salvation Army when they were providing a monthly lunch to area seniors. However, when that program fizzled Chris knew the lunches would be sorely missed and that he needed to find a way to continue the program.

"Chris did it all," says proud wife Julie. "He jumped right in. He called the seniors, made the posted fliers, set up the tables, got coffee and drinks, made all the food, and even cleaned up afterwards."

After a couple years, Julie knew they needed help in order to continue. "I'm horrible in the kitchen, but I'm good at stepping in and putting the word out asking for help with food, serving, and clean up," says Julie.

Thankfully, for the past three years, the Walkers have been receiving that help in the form of donated lunches, grants from the township, and community volunteerism.

"They have hearts made of gold," says lunch regular Judie Mendee. "We wouldn't be here without them!"

## Maureen Sanchez, Featured on Food Network's "Chopped"

A well-timed email launched this Oswego resident onto Food Network's season 13, episode 11 of Chopped. Although she didn't win the \$10,000 prize, Maureen Sanchez was able to raise awareness of missing persons, including her sister Judy, who has been missing since 1980 ([www.facebook.com/groups/LookingForJudy](http://www.facebook.com/groups/LookingForJudy)).

"While I did not walk away with the title Chopped Champion - I had won," Maureen says. "I won for having Judy's picture on national television." The experience also reconfirmed her decision to leave a 20+ year educational software career and pursue a career in high-end food sales, selling items like truffles and caviar. As a direct result of her television experience, she was able to gain instant credibility, something that often takes years to establish. At 47 and the mom of three young kids, she felt a new sense of empowerment taking control of her life as an individual again, yet she remains an active member of her children's lives through their schools, PACE 308, and serving as the unofficial photographer at her boys' baseball games. Maureen also set up a high school culinary program between Chicago chefs and Chicago Public Schools, and occasionally caters with her husband, teaches cooking, and blogs. Maureen loves to network, advocate, and dream big!