

Interview



Donald H. Whitney with one of the 18 children he and his wife personally support

A Light to the World

An Interview with Donald H. Whitney,
 Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer, Corporate Sports Unlimited, Inc.

What is the mission of the World Children's Center?

My family has a history of serving children in need over the past 40 years. When I was a child, there was an infomercial in which I saw some of the challenges that are going on worldwide for children at risk and without hope that really affected me. Today, there are more than 150 million orphan children under the age of 12 in this world for whom I feel we all have responsibility.

In the U.S. alone, there are over six million grandparents raising their grandchildren. Our government system for the more than 600,000 children living in foster care, as well as those in private placement and referral of children in need, can be better served by communities like the World Children's Center, which will provide long-term care, hope, and a measurable system to ensure proper services to God's greatest of all gifts to us – children born in God's wonderful image.

In Georgia, we have close to 10,000 children in foster care. Our goal with the World Children's Center is to build at least 100 homes to serve more than 800 homeless, orphaned, and neglected children from Georgia, the U.S., and the world. The center is a boarding school community that will be developed in three phases over 10 to 12 years built on a master plan that is environmentally friendly.

Our tagline is, "Every child deserves a loving home," which we firmly believe. Our 710-acre campus will serve as a boarding school community where there will be surrogate house parents living in homes that are built to raise eight to ten children per home. House parents will be allowed to have up to two of their own biological children there as well. Our focus is for children to first enter our student homes between the ages of two and 10.

In 2005, we purchased 710 acres of breathtaking west Georgia land, 40 minutes from Atlanta and centrally located between Atlanta, Georgia, Birmingham, Alabama, and Chattanooga, Tennessee. In 2007, we started our infrastructure, and last year, we opened our first student children's home, which is serving as our model home.

We are currently working on raising the capital for student homes two and three and the school, as well as completing the first of seven neighborhoods with nine homes that will serve 72 children. Every student home that is opened must be secured with a minimum four-year endowment to be sure the children are always protected for their needs.

Twenty-five years from now, our 710 acres of land alone could easily worth up to \$100 million because of where the campus is located. I have also secured all assets of the entire campus to be left in perpetuity for the children and their ongoing needs for generations.

We have a volunteer Board of Trustees and Board of Directors, as well as an Academy Board that all care deeply about the well-being of children. The Board of Trustees will govern, protect, and advance the purpose of the World Children's Center. The Board of Directors will consist of up to 25 of the world's foremost business and civic leaders. The Academy Board will focus primarily on the education of the children.

Are you involved with other organizations serving children, such as the UN?

We aspire to be a light to all children and their needs through our work at our International Humanitarian Development and Training Center, a United Nations think tank bringing the best minds in the world together at the World Children's Center to resolve the critical issues affecting the conditions of all children. The center will be a "Light to the World" for homeless, orphaned, and neglected children that is also being built sustainable from the beginning. For example, 21 percent of our property has natural springs, so we pull our own surface water. We also want to share our work with public and private foundations, philanthropists, and corporations so they can see the eternal return on investment that good will and doing the right thing can have through this earth friendly and sustainable community.

Are you looking for corporate involvement and funding?

While our first student home and founding sponsors has been financed by Publix and Gatorade, we must have public and private foundations, philanthropists, corporations, and the general public assist us with getting this project open so we can begin serving the children we have been called to provide a bright and productive future for.

To date, 90 percent of our resources have come through relationships I've had over 30 years in the private sector. However, we know the campus must have the support from caring public and private foundations, individuals, and philanthropists that can truly make a difference and that are wanting to leave a lasting and eternal legacy of doing the right thing. We encourage them to come and join our team. They can contact me at dwhitney@worldchildrenscenter.org. ●

EDITORS' NOTE Donald Whitney is also Founder and President of The U.S. 10K Classic (the sixth largest multi-road race in the U.S.), and of the World Children's Center. The U.S. 10K Classic was developed as a vehicle to bring awareness and funding to children's charities and for the development of the World Children's Center. Whitney, a 10-year veteran tennis professional, worked with Sports Illustrated, and for RockResorts at the Dorado and Cerromar Beach Hotel & Resorts in the Caribbean from 1973 to 1980. He has served on the Board of Directors for Junior Achievement, United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Special Olympics. He has been actively involved with Compassion International, Save the Children, World Help, World Vision, and CCF since 1976. He and his wife, Cathy, proudly support 18 children from eight different nations.

COMPANY BRIEF Corporate Sports Unlimited, Inc. (corpsports.com) is Atlanta's premier health and wellness services organization offering management, consulting, and programming to corporations, universities, multi-tenant class "A" office properties, country clubs, and spas. The company manages 17 clubs with 52,000-plus members, and since 1981, has opened, managed, and served as consultants for more than 45 properties, including clients like Hilton Hotels, Omni Hotels, Marriott Hotels, and select Ritz-Carlton Hotels.

A division of Corporate Sports Unlimited, Inc., Corporate Events Unlimited produces over 350 meetings and team building and special events for the nation's leading companies serving more than 1,000,000 people annually.

The mission of the World Children's Center (www.worldchildrenscenter.org) is to build programs that foster education, provide housing and shelter, and ensure the safety of underserved children. Once completely built, the World Children's Center Academy will provide education, housing, and enrichment/character-building programs, as well as food and clothing to an estimated 800 children.