

## OC Insider

Women of the Year features start p. 1 ... AutoGravity CTO Sheng Wang, OC Community Foundation CEO Shelley Hoss, Second Harvest CEO Nicole Suydam, New American Funding co-founder Patty Arvielo and SeneGence Int'l founder Joni-Rogers Kante ... diverse careers, but all at one point or many "said yes at the door," like event keynoter Julie Hill. Founder of Costain Homes was being courted by blue-blood investor Lord Abbett & Co., when Hill "said yes" future board fellows asking if she played golf. She hadn't. At the annual company outing at Augusta National, she beat two in her foursome ...

# A Lifetime of Devotion

## Born Leader Discovered She was Born to Serve

■ By KIM HAMAN

When someone receives an award like Women of the Year, it's typically a capstone on a career marked by success, drive and unique talents to stand out among accomplished contenders. And often, it's a career that began with a life-altering experience.

Shelley Hoss is president of the Orange County Community Foundation and one of five winners selected from a field of 156 nominees for this year's Business Journal Women of the Year Awards (see other profiles, pages 1, 6, 10 and 13). Under Hoss' leadership, foundation grants and scholarship awards surged from \$5 million when she began top-post tenure in 2000, to \$67 million last year. During the same period, assets stewarded by the foundation increased from \$43 million to \$378 million. It's now the eighth-most active grantmaker of nearly 800 community foundations across the country.

All because Hoss went camping.

### Life-Changing Summer

Thirty-three years ago she was a long way from being the leader of a nationally ranked philanthropic entity. She was a recent college graduate who decided to volunteer at a summer camp for abused and neglected children.

"It was the first time I personally witnessed the deep trauma of children who had been wounded both physically and emotionally by those who should have been their fiercest protectors," Hoss recalls. "These children had suffered the unimaginable, and yet they are expected to keep up in school, be respectful of others, and do all their peers do but with these enormous wounds. It was absolutely gut-wrenching."

Hoss describes lying in her bunk at night, crying herself to sleep. "But then something miraculous happened," she says. "I began to see, even in a very short period of time, the difference that being loved and valued for their true selves could make, to see the compassion that these children expressed to one another. It shattered my heart, reset my mind, and left me absolutely on fire to make my own difference in the world."

### Career of Service

Hoss came off that mountain and headed into the MBA program at the University of California-Irvine, determined to devote her professional career to doing "my small part

to help lessen others' pain."

That drive led to a research project about Orangewood Children's Home, where many of the children from the summer camp had lived. Orangewood became Hoss' first professional home. She stayed for 10 years, helping to provide services for abused and neglected children.

Next she worked as executive director of Girls Inc. of Orange County. In a harbinger of future successes, she tripled revenue to support health and education programs for underserved girls.

In 2000 she came to the community foundation, succeeding founder Judith Swayne. Hoss is quick to credit its immense growth during her tenure to others.

"The primary driver of our success has been the passion, innovation and generosity of Orange County philanthropists," she said. "The community foundation is uniquely positioned to bring philanthropic dreams to reality, acting as a "launching pad" through the combination of our wise stewardship and strategic guidance. This has given donors confidence to be bold with their visions, knowing that we will ensure that maximum impact is achieved."

Her enthusiasm hasn't diminished with time. "Even given all that has been achieved to date," she said, "there is still so much untapped potential here."

### The True Reward

It's no surprise that Hoss found her way to a career of helping others. Her mother, a retired educator, and her father, a telecommunications executive, encouraged her to have compassion for others, which imbued her with a deep need for a sense of purpose when it came to choosing a career path. "All of which, happily, led me straight to the non-profit sector," she said.

Hoss lives in Laguna Niguel with her husband, Alan, and almost 15-year-old son, Sean. Getaways to Maui with her "boys" is her favorite love, along with "listening to my son slay on the tenor sax."

Of her Women of the Year award, Hoss said she was humbled. "I already feel like my professional life is an embarrassment of riches ... to be blessed with work that challenges, inspires and fulfills me each day, with people I deeply respect, admire and trust, is just as good as anything could get. I feel like I should be the one handing out awards of gratitude for the opportunity to do this work!" ■