

# Newsmaker | Debbie Gabelich

## WHO IS SHE?

Chief executive officer, Hope Productions Foundation

## THE ESSENTIALS

- **Age:** 44
- **Born in** Northridge, lives now in Rocklin with husband, Steve; son Alex, 17; and daughter Addison, 14.
- **Education:** B.S., psychology, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

## HER FAVORITE THINGS

- **Book:** "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen
- **Movie:** "Sabrina"
- **Restaurant:** Mason's
- **Vacation spot:** Brac, Croatia
- **Music:** '80s
- **Hobbies:** Traveling, reading, game night with my family
- **Quote:** "Success does not come to you, you go to it." Marva Collins
- **Hero:** My father, for giving me my business ethics and family values
- **Pet peeve:** Those who would rather complain than get things accomplished

## WHAT WAS A MAJOR EMBARRASSMENT IN YOUR LIFE?

I grew up in a very tight-knit family in the San Fernando Valley, and moving away when I went to college was a very big deal, especially when they learned I would be living in a co-ed dorm. At Cal Poly I went out for crew. I was the coxswain, and one time at a celebration all the guys literally jumped on me, and I was at the bottom of a pile. I wound up getting one broken rib and two cracked ones. When I told my parents they insisted I leave college and come home, and it was very difficult to talk them out of it.

## BOB SCHMIDT | CORRESPONDENT

There's plenty of people in the world doing wrong things, Debbie Gabelich acknowledges, but there's still plenty of people willing to do right things, too. She's making a career of showing charities and nonprofit organizations how to find them.

She is CEO of Hope Productions Foundation, a company that trains nonprofits to market themselves efficiently.

"I spent years working with nonprofits," she said, "and I learned that if you don't run your nonprofit like a business, you're not going to succeed. It doesn't matter if you're a for-profit company or a nonprofit charity, you've got to make yourself visible. We train people to do that."

Gabelich doesn't think philanthropy is going to be extinct because of the current economic crisis.

"People still want to give," she said. "I truly believe that in their hearts they want to do good things for their neighbors and their community, they want the areas where they live to be better places for our children."

## How did you get involved in philanthropy?

My older sister had cerebral palsy, so my mom volunteered with the United Cerebral Palsy Foundation for years. ... That was a big part of our world when I was growing up.

When we moved to Sacramento, I became a manager of the catering department at the Clarion Hotel restaurant. When I started to work there I asked "What are we doing for the community," and I found out we weren't doing

anything. I became involved with the (Sacramento) Food Bank and got the Clarion involved, too, and I wound up doing that for seven years.

Finally the people at the Food Bank offered me a job and I thought long and hard and decided I wanted to do something more than just sales, so I quit the Clarion and became a consultant for small nonprofits.

I got a call one day from the Make-A-Wish Foundation asking me to help them, and that led to a full-time job as their director of development and marketing.

## How did Hope Productions Foundation start?

One of our largest donors at Make-A-Wish was Pat McClain, an investment counselor and a major philanthropist, and he invited me to lunch and said he had a job for me. He said he wanted to start a nonprofit whose job it was to help other nonprofits.

I met with him and Gary Lardy, a philanthropist with an online insurance business, and we talked about the need for people involved with nonprofits and charities to receive training in marketing.

When the economy is good, most nonprofits don't have to worry about going out and getting

help from people, so they don't develop a marketing team. That's particularly true of small nonprofits. So when times are not good, like now, they don't have the skills to let people know what they do and why they're doing it.

That's what we do. We provide the training: how to think, how to cultivate, stewarding donors, how to publicize themselves correctly, and how to train their own people to do what needs doing.

We've set up a seven-month, hands-on training program for seven children's charities in town, and we're teaching them the fundamentals that have proven successful in the past.

## How are you doing?

Very well, we think. This first seven-month program ends in May, and at the conclusion, on May 23, there's going to be a 5K walk in the morning and a fund-raising concert at night in Raley Field, donated by the River Cats Foundation, which is one of the nonprofits we're training. The Kings' Bobby Jackson is the official spokesperson for what we call the inaugural Walk 'n Rock for Kids, and the rock band Journey is going to perform.

There are more than 6,000 charities and nonprofits in the Sacramento area, so there is plenty of opportunity for what we want to do.

