

# Astrein honored for helping kids

Birmingham businessman Richard Astrein, who will be honored at the Gold Heart Ball, is well deserving of the Community Service Award he will receive that night.

Astrein is co-owner of Astrein's Creative Jeweler in downtown Birmingham and also is president of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce. But what makes him really special is the time he devotes as a volunteer to causes, particularly those for children.

He will receive his award at a black tie gala fund-raiser Friday at the Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn. The event is presented by Variety, The Children's Charity. Other honorees are Lt. Col. Connie Binsfeld, Humanitarian Award; Bobby Higginson, Sports Award; and The Kroger Co. of Michigan, Barker Award.

Astrein has an infectious and almost constant smile. Over coffee at Caribou, a block away from his jewelry store, he spoke with enthusiasm about his many projects and how he first got involved in working with young people.

"It started in high school," he said. "I grew up in Huntington Woods, in the Berkley School System. In 1971-72, an elementary school had slow students who needed mentoring. A teacher

volunteered her services and Astrein also was asked to help out, during his lunch and study break.

"We bonded really well," he said, referring to how he and the students got along. "I had so much enjoyment."

After high school, he went to Michigan State University, where he got a bachelor of arts degree. Right after graduation, he began working with his younger brother, Gary, who had started a jewelry and gift store called What's Upstairs in downtown Birmingham. Later, they decided to just have a jewelry store and opened Astrein's. Gary is a Birmingham resident, and Astrein lives in Huntington Woods.

"I got active in community events regarding the Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce," he recalled. "I joined the Birmingham Kiwanis and worked with seniors citizens and the Birmingham Area Senior Coordinating Council, and also the Birmingham Village Players."

He said that Kiwanis is an Indian word for "We serve." "I thought that was really nice. We were doing well in the business, but I wanted to give something back to the community."

The Kiwanis did a benefit for Sanctuary, in Royal Oak, the only shelter for runaways (ages 7-17) in Oakland County. When he visited the shelter, it was really an eye-opener, hearing how the kids talked about their dysfunctional families.

His own life experience had been much different. "I grew up in a very solid home situation," he said. The kids' negative comments revealed, "There's a whole world out there I was never part of. It was heartbreaking."

Getting together with the youngsters at the Sanctuary is important. "Sometimes it's just dialogue. I try to get on their level. It opens up so much more," he said.

Astrein has become one of the Sanctuary's most active workers. He served as president for the last three years. "We had a zoo event last year with families. It was quite successful," he said. The evening event will be repeated this June.

In 1997, the Sanctuary merged with Common Ground, also in Royal Oak, which has long served Oakland County families and teens to adults.

"Now, we're one complete service, from A to Z, adults to kids," he said. "It was a tremendous fit." No longer president, Astrein



**Sweet success:** Richard Astrein shows a gold necklace, with gold-and-diamond heart pendant that may be converted to a pin. The jewelry was designed by Astrein's Creative Jeweler and donated to the raffle at the Gold Heart Ball.

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# New support group to meet

The National Bone Marrow Transplant Link, a program of the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute, announces formation of a support group for those who have had a bone marrow transplant.

The link is dedicated to assisting patients, their families and health professionals with information and support.

The support group's first meeting will be held at 7 a.m. Tuesday, May 26, at the Bloomfield Township Public Library at the corner of Lone Pine and Telegraph roads. It will meet the

fourth Tuesday of each month at the library. It is open without charge to family members or caregivers.

The group offers a chance to meet with others who have shared a similar experience, and to discuss common concerns. Discussions will be led by a BMT social worker and a BMT nurse coordinator. A wide range of topics will be covered.

For more information on bone marrow transplantation, or to confirm attendance in the group, call toll free: 800-LINK-BMT (800-546-5268) or locally (248) 443-5800, Ext. 6618.

The BMT support group represents a collaborative effort of many health care organizations in the Detroit area. Active participation in the formation of the group came from Harper Hospital, Henry Ford Hospital, the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center, Oakwood Hospital, Sinai Hospital, the Leukemia Society of America and Gilda's Club. Funding for the program was made available through support from the Metro Health Foundation and the Jewish Fund.

Children have many special needs...and because parents don't always have a lot of time, the Observer & Eccentric has created this unique directory to make life just a little easier.

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