



Hearts in Vancouver

photography Lindsay Siu written by Michelle Hopkins

Just call them the A-List: the activists, advocates and articulators of worthy causes, driven to fulfil the hopes and dreams of children and families all over the province. On the surface it might appear that Wendy Cocchia, Pamela Martin and Michelle Cooke have little in common. One is a respected television broadcaster, one a savvy businesswoman and the other a competitive athlete. Their age difference spans thirty years.

But the thread that binds them is their collective heart. After having accomplished much in their own lives, they are now using their clout to champion for children in need, the disenfranchised, the poor and the “throwaway people” in our communities.



nce a Miss Teen U.S.A., Pamela Martin was the first female beat reporter at CKNW in 1976.

Breaking barriers throughout her illustrious career, the affable Martin has put her popularity to work as an outspoken advocate for many years for the Canadian Cancer Society, the Variety Club and Big Sisters of B.C. among many others.

“There’s a sense of duty because I feel that I have been so blessed with good fortune . . . with that comes responsibility to be the best person I can be,” says Martin, a mother of two grown children, ages 19 and 21. “My dad died of cancer and so it’s a cause that means a lot to me. I like to go a bit deeper and get my hands dirty, so to speak.” The diminutive Martin (she’s even more beautiful in person) recalls years ago, after her children were a little older, searching for some kind of meaning in her life. She remembers questioning, “What is my purpose in this life?” She decided to give back by donating her talent, putting her skill as an announcer to work. Martin MCs many fundraising galas throughout the year including the Canadian Cancer Society’s Diamond Ball and Cocchia’s Century Plaza Hotel and Spa Women’s Media Golf Classic.

In the work came her vision. Several causes that have become very personal to Martin include Cocchia’s Variety Learning Centre, and The Looking Glass’s fundraising efforts to build a facility for adolescents suffering with eating disorders. Martin became involved after parents from the Looking Glass Foundation approached her to MC an event. It grew from there. “There’s so much pressure out there to look like Nicole Ritchie,” says Martin. “I’ve spoken to many young girls suffering from eating disorders and it’s so sad . . . they

want to die, the disease is all they have. It’s tragic and breaks my heart. Some of the parents that have started this have mortgaged their homes. There is no facility in our province to treat this insidious disorder.”

Vancouver native Wendy Cocchia pairs her gifts as an all-around businesswoman extraordinaire with her passion for social activism. Through her annual fundraiser the Century Plaza Hotel and Spa Women’s Media Golf Classic – now celebrating its 20th year – Cocchia is changing the lives of children with special needs. For Cocchia, it’s all about inclusion for all disabled people, and she is on a mission to make that a reality. With a direct stare, the no-nonsense, friendly Cocchia speaks passionately about the lack of programs and services available for parents and children with special needs. She has used her influence and fundraising success to build the Vancouver Oral Centre for Deaf Children, the Children’s Foundation Building, the Down Syndrome Resource Centre and the Variety Learning Centre.

“Our next project is to build a second variety centre in Vancouver (the other is in Coquitlam) because the first one is bursting at the seams,” says Cocchia. “It’s a centre for children with autism, Down syndrome, ADD, rare diseases and

“It’s about making every person feel like they have purpose in life.”

disorders, and brain damage that offers a variety of teaching styles and disciplines.” More than that, parents of mentally or physically challenged children are offered choice and many outreach programs. “It’s all about providing choice – for families to have a say,” explains Cocchia. “There are absolutely no fees to parents and the classes are kept small, about six to ten children per class.”

Cocchia doesn’t just throw

money to charitable causes; she is hands-on. The mother of two loves going to the centre as often as her hectic schedule will allow. Cocchia says she learns so much about the human spirit each time she visits. “I need the touch-feely. The children are so accepting of each other; they appreciate things we take for granted,” says Cocchia. “The centre celebrates every accomplishment. It’s about making every person feel like they have purpose in life. I remember meeting a single mom and her 11-year-old son, who suffered from cerebral palsy, who we sent to Disneyland [through her golf tournament fundraising] and she thanked me for our thoughtfulness and for giving her son such joy,” recalls Cocchia. “That was nearly ten years ago and I still remember it. “If I can impact even one person, I will have felt like it was worth it.”

Cocchia thanks her parents for her grounding and credits them for teaching her about compassion and the need to reach out to others less fortunate. “My parents were always great supporters of the Variety Club and other worthwhile causes, and I grew up seeing that,” says Cocchia. In a pragmatic voice she sums it up: “We are all going to need help at some point in our lives – no matter how much money we have. So how can we not help? How can we not reach out to others?”

Michelle Cooke agrees. The wife of Canucks hockey player Matt Cooke, she grew up in a family that placed a lot of value on helping out in the community, in whatever capacity they could. “It comes from growing up in a small town,” says Cooke, a young mother of three. “My dad always said treat others well and always remember how fortunate you are.” It was love of





Wendy Cocchia

She is a powerhouse. The president of Absolute Spa Group, which employs 200 people at her seven operations, and executive vice-president of the Century Plaza Hotel & Spa, she is also a dedicated mom, wife and tireless philanthropist. In 1987, she founded the Century Plaza Hotel & Spa Women's Media Golf Classic that has raised more than \$2 million for various children's charities. She is passionate about the projects built with the fundraising funds such as the Vancouver Oral Centre for Deaf Children.

What was the best gift you ever received?

My family.

Best gift your ever gave?

Numerous sentimental photos in a handmade frame.

What's the most enduring gift you have ever received?

Unconditional love from family and close friends.

The most enduring gift you have ever given?

Dream wishes for special children along with my Women's Media Classic pals. Every wish is a tearjerker.

The best reason to give?

To truly make a significant difference in someone's life who is desperately in need, which then brings some peace to a difficult life.

What makes you give?

It is the absolute best feeling in the world, unlike anything else, which gives me joy in my life. It's a deep, personal feeling that is difficult to describe.

When you were young, what was your happiest moment?

Family dinners.

And when you grew up, how did your happiness change? – Happiest moment as an adult?

It didn't; still family dinners!!!

Who inspires you?

My hubby, Peter Legge, and Grace McCarthy.

The worst trait in people?

Jealousy and vanity.

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

Make people absolutely tolerant and compassionate to those with disabilities.

If you could make one wish come true, what would it be?

The end of human suffering, to end children and people being born with disabilities, disorders and disease. Corny and from a movie but, oh, so true: it does come down to world peace.

Wendy is wearing a red lace Dolce & Gabbana gown, available at Holt Renfrew, Pacific Centre \$6,995

Diamond and 18 karat gold jewellery for the shoot provided by Brinkhaus Jewellers \$1850 to \$34,000.



Michelle Cooke

Not only the wife of Canucks' left winger Matt Cooke, she is a force to be reckoned in her own right. Michelle, a star athlete, has parlayed her dedication to sports into another passion – her own nonprofit foundation and children's causes. She and Matt recently started the Cooke Family Foundation of Hope, which will benefit a number of children's charities throughout the province. The couple recently purchased a suite at the Giants' games and host the suite for children in need.

What is the best gift you ever received?

My three children . . . hands down.

Best gift you ever gave?

Donation of Cooke's Corner Suite [which is part of her foundation] to various children's charities.

What is the most enduring gift you have ever received?

Sense of self-worth and respect from my parents.

The most enduring gift you have ever given?

Teaching my children patience, self-respect and that anything is possible.

The best reason to give?

Knowing you are making a difference no matter how small the gift-gesture may appear.

When you were young, what was your happiest moment?

Family holidays. They were crazy but a lot of fun!

Who inspired you when you were growing up?

My parents . . . Zola Budd (my parents would get that!)

Who inspires you now?

My husband, my children, my parents, my brothers, friends: all those who have been there unconditionally over the years . . . through the good and the bad. They inspire me to keep going because they believe in my vision, my cause and me.

What is the best trait in people?

Ability to forgive and overcome adversity even when they feel it's not possible. Realizing they are stronger than you ever thought possible.

What is the worst trait in people?

Selfishness! No question.

If you could make one wish come true, what would it be?

That every child could be healthy and safe. It's that simple! Okay, maybe let my husband win the Stanley Cup before he retires! Hahahahahah!

Michelle Cooke is wearing Alberta Ferretti, at Holt Renfrew \$4995



Pamela Martin

A television icon on CTV, a woman who campaigns for children, a dedicated fundraiser and mother, Pamela Martin has paved the way for other female anchors to succeed in what was once a male-dominated field. Pamela still found time to launch her own fashion show charity event last year. She sits on numerous boards including the Vancouver International Film Festival and the Canadian Cancer Society, and campaigns for The United Way, Diamond Ball, the Ladies Media Golf Classic, and others.

What is the best gift you ever received?

My children.

The best reason to give?

To make someone else's life better . . . to give happiness.

What makes you give?

I want to make a difference in the world. At the end of the day, it's about what is valuable in life and what really counts.

Who gave you the most?

My mother Virginia Derderian. I know I should say Gandhi, but my mother is my life role model; she's very special.

When you were young what was your happiest moment?

When my whole family was doing something together . . . family trips and skiing. My dad use to call them "magic moments."

And when you grew up, how did your happiness change? – happiest moment as an adult?

The same except now it's with my own family. Skiing down the mountain with my children and husband. I make a mental note to capture that memory and store it away.

What is the best trait in people?

Generosity in everything: of spirit, love and giving.

What is the worst trait in people?

Dishonesty and phoniness.

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

I would eradicate poverty, pain, suffering and all diseases. I guess that's more than one!

If you could make one wish come true, what would it be?


That all children have a happy childhood and live a long, healthy and happy life.

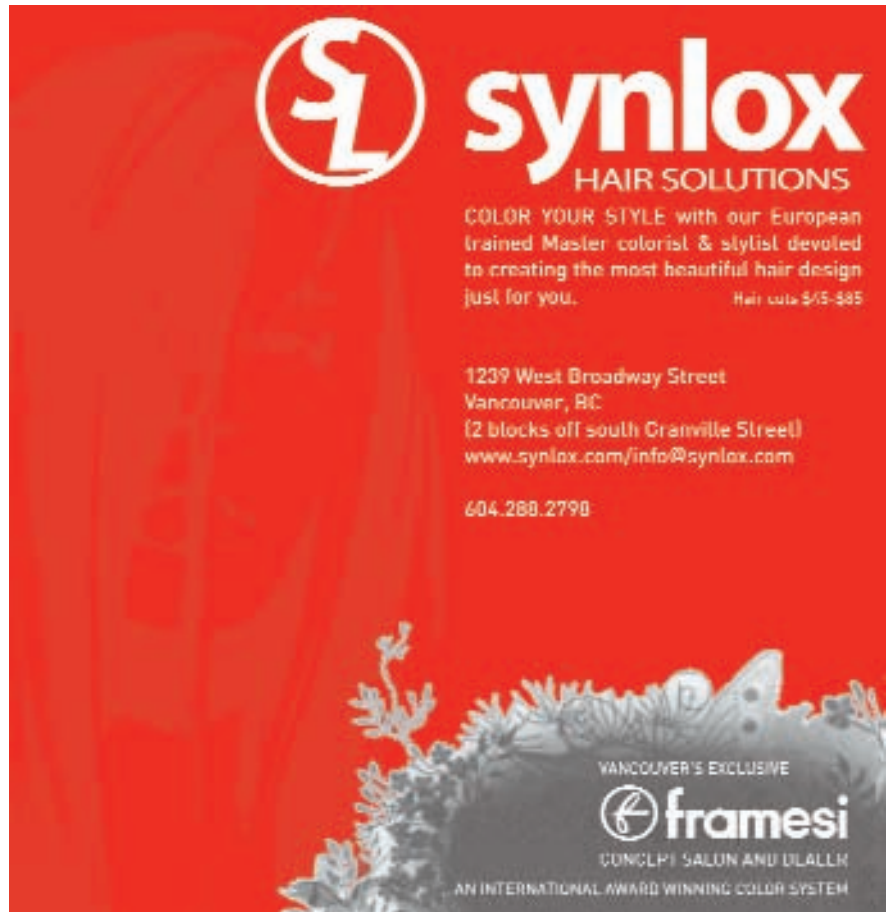
Pamela is wearing Amanda Wakely. Available at Holt Renfrew, gown \$2995; shawl \$650

sports and their mutual competitiveness that brought Matt and Michelle together. They also found out they both came from small towns in which helping thy neighbour was a given.

Cooke gave up her career as a case manager in a young offenders' home to follow Matt to Vancouver. "It was a tough job and most of them didn't have a fighting chance to begin with," recalls Cooke. "How can I not help children that I see who have nothing? How can I not?" That strong social awareness coupled with the death of a niece propelled her two years ago to give birth to the Cooke Foundation for Hope. Her brother Brandon and wife Jamie, high school sweethearts, were pregnant with their first child. A few weeks before the birth, something went terribly wrong and Hope was born with no heartbeat. "She was a beautiful seven-pound little girl and after her funeral we [Matt and her] knew we had to do something," says Cooke in a choking voice. "We didn't want her death to be in vain."

Even prior to creating their foundation Cooke with her husband, had long been involved in the Vancouver Canucks' fundraising initiatives. They are still frequent visitors of Canuck Place (for terminally ill children) and B.C. Children's Hospital, and are involved in the annual Dice & Ice event and Province Empty Stocking Fund. "We get requests from so many children's organizations out there and you want to say yes to all of them," Cooke muses. "How do you close the door on any children's charity? I want to grant all the wishes."

What the three ladies all share is they all learned their values, morals and beliefs from their parents. They all believe that the future of humanity depends on showing kindness and love towards one another. Sappy? they all asked. Perhaps, but true. All three women have taken a leading role in community activities. They all have been, in their own unique way, catalysts behind numerous projects benefiting children and families in our province. They have been blessed. Because of that, so have we. 



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