

The Benassi Family

The Benassi family has always felt that volunteering should be an important part of their everyday lives. John, Marian, Chris and Max were introduced to Kids Korps when they moved to Rancho Santa Fe in 1995. The boys were five and seven years old and Kids Korps was just getting started.

Once they realized how wonderful the concept was, and how Kids Korps would give them the opportunity to volunteer for charity work together as a family, they knew the organization was a perfect match for their family. It opened the doors to instill in their children the concept of helping people in less fortunate situations and gave their children the opportunity to experience the joy of helping others.

The Benassi family has a long history of community service. Marian worked for the United Nations in the Human Rights division and her background in International Relations and broadcasting was put to good use to help others. She has worked internationally assisting flood victims in the Philippines and did relief work in Guatemala. Domestically, she has done endless volunteer work in the community. John, a patent lawyer, has volunteered his time as a public defender, a prosecutor, and by introducing inner city children to technology and IP law. His law firm, Heller Ehrman, has a rich history of *pro bono* work including representing Kids Korps.

Marian used her leadership skills to take an active role as co-president for the Rancho Santa Fe chapter and helped expand Kids Korps' activities. Marian sat on the Regional Board during its growth from a single chapter to over 30 chapters. As Kids Korps was expanding throughout the country, she saw a need to create a Chapter Liaison position and Chapter Leader Manual that would help chapter leaders in running new chapters. Marian was named Volunteer of the Year by the Philanthropy Council in 2004. She has worked on the galas' committees over the years and in 2006 she was the Co-Gala Chair. She worked tirelessly over the years to help take Kids Korps to the next level.

John has been influential in the past 30 years as a patent attorney being listed in "Best Lawyers in America," "Top Lawyers" in both San Diego and Los Angeles, "Top 100 in the Nation", and "Super Lawyers" for Southern California. Over the years, John has advised Kids Korps in legal matters, and has provided sponsorship and support individually and through the San Diego office of Heller Ehrman, where he is the Managing Shareholder.

During their early years with Kids Korps, the Benassis enthusiastically immersed themselves in feeding the homeless, organizing a Christmas bag program for teens at New Alternatives and working with the Helen Woodward Animal Center. One of the

very first opportunities with Kids Korps led them to a shelter in downtown San Diego to feed the homeless. At that time, the boys were not tall enough to reach the plates and had to stand on a step stool to help serve the food. They performed plays for kids at shelters, did projects during holidays, provided bags at Christmas for teens at San Pasqual Academy, participated in Stuff-a-Bag and Build-a-Bike projects for needy children, visited orphanages in Mexico, and built bee hives. Both boys have also been camp counselors for the last 2 summers. The Benassi family received the Kids Korps David Hammond Award for Outstanding Family Volunteerism in 2001.

This theme of *pro bono* and helping the less fortunate has rubbed off on the Benassi children.

Chris, now a 17-year-old junior at Cathedral Catholic High School, is President of the first Teen Korps chapter for Cathedral and a member of the Teen Korps advisor board. He affirms, “Kids Korps has allowed me to gather with friends and family for the chance to give back to the community. It gave me the satisfaction of helping the unfortunate in our society. Kids Korps has helped me gain a better perspective and understanding of what less fortunate people go through so that I take less for granted.”

Max, now 15, was the first poster child for Kids Korps when he was five years old.

His first memories of Kids Korps are doing the Stuff-a-Bag project when it was first held in the Doshay's backyard. "The projects I remember the most are the Build-a-Bike projects and being a camp counselor, teaching kids about charity work and how they can help others. We would do a different volunteer project each day so the campers really got to experience the joys of philanthropy." Max says, "Kids Korps has changed my life by teaching me leadership skills and making me aware of how fortunate I am to have such a loving family and to be raised in such ideal conditions. It has opened my eyes to the world of philanthropy and volunteering. It's something I plan on continuing in the future."

Most recently, the boys organized the collection of school supplies for the San Pasqual Academy fire victims.

John and Marian believe they are very fortunate to have the opportunities that place them in this wonderful community and that it would be irresponsible to insulate their children from the plight of the less fortunate. Rather, they use Kids Korps to build a tradition of unselfishness through volunteer work and commitment to the community, so that as a family, they can have the satisfaction of making a difference in the lives of those around them.