

# PHILANTHROPY

## FROM THE HEART CARMEL BUSINESSWOMEN MAKE GIVING A PRIORITY

BY RENEE BRINCKS



Photo: Andrew Parfenov

Throughout the past year, headlines often carried heaviness. Corporate scandal. Ponzi schemes. Job cuts and home foreclosures. It might have left Americans disheartened, except that every tale of greed was matched with stories of good deeds, generosity and hope.

People really do want to help others. The United States boasts more than 1.5 million public charities, private foundations and nonprofits, with nearly 160,000 based in California alone. Monterey County organizations remove landmines from foreign lands, rescue animals here at home, and serve youth, those with health challenges, senior citizens and countless other populations. With a still-shaky economy and a world where violence and mistrust leave many in fear, community involvement seems more important now than ever.

The three Carmel professionals featured here are among many locals who make charitable giving a big part of their business plan. Carmel Plaza boutique owner Silvia Sweidan grew up with a Jordanian father and a Ukrainian mother, studied cultural anthropology and social transformation, and has lived in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Poland native Marta Karpel was a marketing executive for British Petroleum in Europe until settling on the Monterey Peninsula and launching a real estate career. Before joining her husband in the jewelry business, Deborah Lee was a Peace Corps worker in Ghana, and she

continues to volunteer for various causes.

While shaped by diverse life experiences, each of these women has reached a similar conclusion: Donating a portion of business proceeds to those in need makes good

sense. They turn their own careers and passions into opportunities to give. Clients get excited about the chance to make a difference. And, charity recipients feel the impact from the Monterey Bay to Cambodia to Lebanon and beyond.

Just what inspires these women's efforts?

For Karpel, it's gratitude.

"I think I'm just thankful for what I have, and I feel it's my obligation to the world to share that," she explains.

Solidarity moves Sweidan to act.

"Everyone's connected, and it's very powerful to know that we're all beings in the same community—a global community that we are responsible for," she says.

And for Lee, helping feels best when it means motivating others to feel like they have control of their destinies.

"I've done really big projects, when I was in the Peace Corps, and I've also done smaller ones. What's always moved me is empowering people to know that they can make a difference themselves," she says. "I love hooking up people with the right organizations and empowering them to make a little difference in the world."

# DEBORAH LEE

KERRY LEE JEWELRY

CHARITY: GIVE WITH BOTH HANDS



Deborah Lee, vice president of Kerry Lee Jewelry, spent two years in Africa with the Peace Corps and has given time to suicide hotlines, hospice patients and other organizations. It was natural, then, that she incorporate benevolence into her own business plan.

Last May, she launched the Give With Both Hands project. Participating clients purchase the 18-karat yellow and rose gold More Love & Peace pendant, which Lee designed. They receive a custom-made piece of jewelry, and 35 percent of the purchase price benefits the charity of their choice.

To date, buyers have supported the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, author Greg Mortenson's Central Asia Institute, as well as environmental causes, Alzheimer's research and Christian youth organizations. Lee says some customers purchase the pendant as a gift, while others buy it for themselves and donate in the name of friends and family members. The goal is inspiring and empowering people to help others, no matter who wears the necklace.

"It's not necessarily the big things you do but, borrowing from Mother Teresa, the small things you do with big love," she says.

To participate:  
[www.kerrylee.com](http://www.kerrylee.com)

Photo: Keili Urdahl

# SILVIA SWEIDAN

SVS FASHION

CHARITY: WOMAN 4 WOMAN



When Silvia Sweidan wrapped up a job in Africa and settled in California, she couldn't sleep for a week.

"Once you go to Africa, it changes you," she says. "It changes you to the point where you feel you need to do something and give back. You learn so much from people there. They have such a beautiful raw existence, and at the same time, they just need basics."

Sweidan responded by forming Woman 4 Woman, a charitable organization that supports disadvantaged women in Africa and the Middle East. Today, she donates five percent of every transaction at her Carmel Plaza accessories store, SVS Fashion, to the cause. In addition, she contributes to the Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco.

"On this journey of life there are certain responsibilities that we all have," says Sweidan, explaining that needy individuals deserve assistance whether they are in India, China, Africa or elsewhere. She describes one Woman 4 Woman beneficiary, a Lebanese widow, who bought a sewing machine and now supports her children through a neighborhood tailoring business.

"You're not just giving out the fish," she says. "You're teaching someone how to fish."

To participate:  
[www.woman4woman.org](http://www.woman4woman.org)

Photo: Keili Urdahl

# MARTA KARPIEL

ALAIN PINEL REALTORS  
CHARITY: FREEDOM FIELDS USA



After assisting Hurricane Katrina victims for 10 post-disaster days, Marta Karpel returned to Carmel ready for more.

“When I saw how much you can do as a person, not being extremely rich but just giving of yourself, I wanted to be more involved,” she says.

Karpel signed on as a volunteer website designer for Freedom Fields USA, a Carmel-based organization working to remove Cambodian landmines. Before long, the Alain Pinel Realtor began donating 10 percent of her net real estate income to the organization. She’s since traveled to Cambodia twice.

“These people are basically living in shack houses, with no bathrooms, no kitchen and such primitive conditions,” says Karpel. “When you see what \$10 can do, what \$100 can do, it’s just unbelievable.”

Clearing mines is a basic step, she explains, that allows Cambodians to address bigger issues.

“If they have clean land, they can grow vegetables. They can build homes. They can go to school,” she says. “Then, all these other problems—prostitution and robbery and other problems—will become much smaller. Every time you go there, you cry. They are the most beautiful people with the most open hearts, and they are very, very thankful.”

Photo: Keili Urdahl

To participate:  
[www.carmelcastles.com](http://www.carmelcastles.com)  
[www.ffusa.org](http://www.ffusa.org)