

INSIDE: T&G's Guide to Financial Services



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Meet 2004's  
*Renaissance*  
Person of the Year

Centre County's Bob Potter has worked  
his volunteer magic for nearly three decades

# CentreServices

BY JENNIFER AZARI

As the holiday season approaches, consider gifting big-ticket items through NCBF

Art Conner had a mission. It was 1996, three years since he had been diagnosed with a form of esophageal cancer that usually was fatal to those who contracted it. However, he fought back and survived complex surgery to remove the cancer. Now he was looking to raise funds for the American Cancer Society, an organization with which he had become active after the surgery and the constant monitoring of his recovery in the following years.

Conner, a State College resident since 1958, approached former business associate and longtime friend Sam Mannino, a Centre County native, and began to brainstorm ways to spur donations to the charitable organization. What Conner and Mannino created was the National Charities Benefits Foundation Inc. (NCBF).

"Unless the tax laws change, this is and has been a great program from the start," says Mannino, who has operated NCBF from his office in Pennsylvania Furnace for the past eight years.

The concept of NCBF is refreshingly new and outwardly simple: Centre County residents donate cars, trucks, boats, real estate and other assets to NCBF and receive a tax deduction for each donation. Local charities and churches also benefit greatly, having been designated by contributors to receive 75 percent of the money earned from the sale of the vehicles and other items donated to the popular nonprofit.

"It's a real win-win situation," explains Mannino. "Where else can you donate something

you don't want anymore, get a tax write-off and have a large portion given to your favorite charity or church?"

After Conner and Mannino agreed upon a charity as the best way to funnel money to the American Cancer Society, Mannino contacted friend Keith Clark, president/attorney with Shumaker & Williams of Camp Hill, a law firm that specializes in business and tax law. Clark was so enamored of the nonprofit idea that his firm offered to fund the startup costs of the charity. Mannino and Conner eventually funded the startup costs themselves, but the law firm handled the Internal Revenue Service application process at a highly reduced rate.

"Within a few months, Keith called me and said the IRS was going to approve the application and said that we

should get ready to move," says Mannino. "But we needed a board of directors—fast." He and Conner contacted Mimi Coppersmith Fredman, publisher of *Town&Gown* magazine and a cancer survivor herself. The men invited her to lunch.

"We explained the program to her," Mannino recalls. "She was ecstatic, loved the idea and agreed to be on our board. Once Mimi came aboard, it really got us rolling, since her name added a lot of credibility to our efforts."

Others joined the NCBF board and added their own credentials to the organization: the late Doris Sapia of State College, and Mary



Courtesy of Sam Mannino

**Sam Mannino and his volunteer colleagues with National Charities Benefit Foundation accept charitable donations of goods, including hundreds of cars, which benefit both donors and designated recipient groups.**

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Jeanette Mannino JD CRNA/JD and Linda Callahan, CRNA/Ph.D., both of Southern California. Conner died from a heart attack in December 2000, but two of his children, Drucilla Conner Weirauch and Chance Conner, still carry on his work as members of the NCBF board.

Thanks to the elder Conner's vision, a variety of Centre County organizations benefit from the thousands of dollars raised by NCBF each year. From The Special Kids Network to the Pennsylvania SPCA, organizations and the local communities they serve experience great benefits from NCBF's efforts.

Betty Lou Morgen is one county resident who has witnessed the impact NCBF has had both locally and abroad. An administrative assistant at the State College Assembly of God, she says a church member worked with NCBF to donate funds to the church last spring.

"At that point I wasn't aware of the organization," Morgen says. She explains that the funds were used to help missionary projects around the world, in countries such as Indonesia and Venezuela. "It was an added blessing," she says of the donation. "The missionaries were able to utilize the funds to enhance the programs."

Although the NCBF's donation to the church funded international projects, Mannino says that most of the donations stay in Centre County. "That's the key that makes it work," he says. "We had visions of taking this program national, but my goal was to keep the money in Centre County. You tell us where the money goes, and we send it there."

Today NCBF still operates with an all-volunteer staff from its original location in Pennsylvania Furnace. Mannino and sons Joe, Brian and Chris pick up more than 150 vehicles a year, among other items.

Although the task is enormous, Mannino says he enjoys his work. "I was fortunate to grow up in the State College community," he says. "I had good core values and a good place to live, and I want to pay back the community. It's very rewarding."

To reach NCBF headquarters, call 692-5277 or e-mail century15@adelphia.net. For information regarding vehicle donations and drop-offs, call 353-8890. For general information visit [www.nationalcharities.org](http://www.nationalcharities.org) online.

Azari, better known by her friends as "Jaz," is a junior international relations/German dual major and was a Fall 2003 *Town&Gown* intern.

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