

Art Hannus: Giving Back to the Community is a Wonderful Way of Life

BY DREW WILSON

Kids from a tough neighborhood where crime is rampant and drugs can be found on the nearest street corner often run with the wrong crowd because the only role models they see on the streets are bad ones.

Art Hannus, who grew up in a tough Chicago neighborhood in a family with 10 kids, was nine when his dad died and 19 when his mother died. He can recall running home from school every day because there were drugs and shootings in his neighborhood. Kids with much more have gone astray, but not Hannus. Although, truth be told, Hannus' idol was a masked man.

"When I was growing up, I used to watch 'The Lone Ranger' and 'The Cisco Kid.' You can say they were just TV shows, but they were my role models," said Hannus, who is President and CEO of American Heritage Protective Services, Inc. "I became a police officer because I thought it was a pretty noble thing to help people."

In the spring and summer of 1968, Hannus was a police cadet assigned to special projects and research. Four years later, at 23, Hannus became the youngest burglary detective in the City of Chicago. That experience as a police officer has stayed with Hannus his whole life.

"There were 10 officers killed in the line of duty (in 1968)," Hannus said. "I saw up close how tragedy of a fallen officer affected their immediate families and friends, every member of the department and the entire city. Every day when police officers put their uniforms on and head out door, no one knows if they're coming home. Only heroes do this work."

Honoring those heroes has become almost as much his life's work as his fulltime CEO job with American Heritage Protective Services, a company that provides for the safety and well being of commercial and industrial prop-

erty owners, educational institutions, healthcare facilities and Fortune 100 companies.

Hannus has actively supported police charitable causes over the years. Most recently, he has pledged to raise \$100,000 over the next three years in support of the Chicago Police Memorial to be built adjacent to Soldier Field. He kicked this off back in February with a check for \$10,000, and has pledged an additional \$20,000 to the effort. On August 10, his company is hosting the Friends of Chicago's Finest First Annual Golf Outing at Cog Hill Golf Club to benefit the Chicago Police Memorial Foundation.

But it's not just the police who have benefited from Hannus' good will. American Heritage sponsors scholarships for the South West Special Recreation Association's summer day camp for individuals with mental and physical disabilities. He recently attended the "Fireworks For Kids Foundation" July 23-25th in Denver, Colorado at the request of the world-renowned Chicago Fire professional soccer team, and has supported St. Margaret Mercy Hospital, local theater, as well as efforts on behalf of the American Cancer Society, Easter Seals and Right-to-Life groups.

"I grew up in a tough neighborhood, but I knew I was supposed to do good things," he said adding several other people from the neighborhood - including Chuck Ramsey, the Chief of Police in Washington D.C., Paul Kaupas who holds the top law enforcement position with the Will County, Ill. Sheriff's Department, Phil Cline, another friend from his youth is the current Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department, while another neighborhood friend, Tim McCarthy, is known world-wide as the Secret Service Agent who was shot while protecting President Reagan. "That's the values we grew up with - service to the community our entire life. On the business end, I haven't forgotten that."

Not that there haven't been hard times at different points in his life that could have made it easier to forget those values.

"When my dad died, I would shine shoes in the old stockyard to make money," he said. "If I didn't do that, we wouldn't eat that day."

About 7 years ago, at age 50, due to a hostile business takeover he found himself nearly bankrupt and forced to start over. The he discovered what it means to have friends.

"I never asked anyone for help, but people came to me offering \$10,000 or \$25,000," he said. "These were not wealthy people, but they were my friends and I was so moved by it."

The parallels to "It's A Wonderful Life," the Jimmy Stewart Christmas classic, were obvious, even to someone who admits to not being a particular fan of the movie.

"I used to see the movie on TV every year, and I hated it," Hannus laughs now. "But when my friends started coming forward...it was so striking it was scary."

After he got back on a firm financial footing, Hannus got the idea to hold "Bailey Parties" for his family, friends, clients and employees. This past year, the party was held to dedicate American Heritage's new corporate headquarters, and Karolyn Grimes, best known for her role as "Zuzu" in "It's A Wonderful Life" was the guest of honor.

Grimes, who has had more than her share of hardship in her life, including the loss of both her parents when she was very young, plus the deaths of two husbands and a son, shared with the audience a special insight she learned from the movie.

"I drew strength and inspiration," Grimes concluded with a smile, "from the story of a man who understood that all you can take with you is that which you've given away."

Hannus knows exactly what she means.