

# St. Jude's leader to stay for good

*Spadafor's efforts rewarded with permanent post*

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Christine Spadafor possesses a lot of knowledge and success when it comes to flipping things.

First, as a teenager, she worked in a McDonald's restaurant on Peninsula Drive in Erie, Penn., serving thousands of locals and tourists entering the gateway to Presque Isle, a ritzy vacation spit of land along the shores of Lake Erie.

Today, at 52, she's the chief executive officer of St. Jude's Ranch for Children and a person who single-handedly saved the entire 40-year-old organization from going bankrupt and having to stop its services to hundreds of abused, abandoned or neglected youth and infants.

"This place three years ago was going broke, so we decided we needed to take drastic action," said Ralph Manning of Fort Worth, Texas, chairman of St. Jude's national board of directors, while in Boulder City attending the Night of Lights event Nov. 30. "We hired Christine to come in and do an assessment. The first question asked was do we need St. Jude's to exist. When we said yes, she came back with 112 recommendations that were very good and took 18 months to implement. I can say she is the primary factor why these doors are open and thriving today."

Manning, the 36-year-old partner of Progress Equity Partners of Dallas, Tex., that acquires, manages and sells companies, said the fate of St. Jude's hung by a thin financial thread back in early 2004.

"We said if we hit the wall in six months and could not meet payroll, we'd start losing staff," he said. "If we can't keep staff, then it's a downward spiral. It was a very sobering period. We weren't

cash flowing, we were hemorrhaging. It was like a surgery. Either we did something, or we'd die."

To find the right person to flip the organization from near-bankruptcy to a more solvent footing, the national board hired the firm Consulting Resource Group.

At that time, the Rev. Stephen Mues ran St. Jude's, but left in September 2005 for a ministry in the Midwest, with the chairman of the national board filling in after his departure.

CRG knew of Spadafor and recommended her to the St. Jude's board, which hired her in the summer of 2005 on an interim basis to assess the situation and a year later named her as the interim chief executive officer.

A few months ago, Spadafor was rewarded for her work by being named the permanent chief executive officer.

Manning said her diverse employment background as an attorney, a practical nurse, a CEO of a children's hospital and a management consultant weighed heavily in her favor.

"We were fortunate to find Christine, who had both a clinical and administrative background," he said. "She brought that unique characteristic that's hard to find. It's always challenging to try to find someone who can bring both skills."

Spadafor began, as Manning said, by recommending 112 different actions that have either been implemented or are being implemented today.

"We did a thorough review of our Model of Care Program for the children to make sure we were implementing the best practices and instilling a culture of continuous improvement," she said. "We



LOUIE TRAUB/VIEW

St. Jude's Ranch for Children Chief Executive Officer Christine Spadafor shows off a hall of children's artwork, Nov. 20. Spadafor was brought in on an interim basis three years ago to help turn the 40-year-old organization around. A few months ago, her position was made permanent. Ralph Manning of Fort Worth, Texas, chairman of St. Jude's national board of directors, credits Spadafor with saving the ranch.

knew we had been successful because the guy who licenses us from the Department of Family Services said from summer '06 to '07, when his report came out, we had zero deficiencies. That's important because the kids always come first."

The way the successful program came about was by having the organization's top executives spell out a course of action.

"The board, the senior management team and I assembled goals for us to achieve and we achieved them all," Spadafor said, noting the importance of staff. "The staff on the campus is dedicated to children. It's very stable and we have little or no turnover. Our emphasis is on training for the staff to make sure they feel confident in their work and providing opportunities for growth and

development."

Probably the most important staff members are the house parents who take on the crucial responsibility of helping to raise the children.

For that reason, potential house parents are screened and re-screened for acceptability, which makes finding them a not-so-easy task.

"There is a challenge of finding and hiring good staff," Spadafor said. "It's a lifestyle choice because it's their house, as well."

The CEO admits some staff, including some house parents, left St. Jude's after she arrived there when they realized a greater degree of accountability was going to be required.

A lot of that came about with Spadafor introducing new technology that linked the campus electronically, which required additional and more

detailed recordkeeping.

Spadafor's efforts to flip the sinking ship around have paid off in that her term of employment is open-ended, which will give her and the others a chance to complete a three-year strategy for improvement.

"We now have in place a three-year strategy that includes a growth agenda," she said. "We are analyzing opportunities for new programs, both on the campus and in a new community outreach program. Some services are going to expand beyond the 40 acres in Boulder City and into communities where services are needed the most."

Manning, who has served on the national board since 2000 and has been its chairman for two and a half years, predicted the budget and the number of children being served by St. Jude's will double in the next

two years under Spadafor's guidance and there will be a fourth campus started at an as-yet unspecified location in the next three years.

If that wasn't enough, St. Jude's also is helping Clark County in its identification of service delivery gaps to youth.

"We applied for a capacity-building grant and were awarded \$50,000 for that," Spadafor said. "The purpose of the grant is for us to analyze gaps in service ... and design programs around them. Right now, we're in the planning phase."

Being at the top of the St. Jude's organizational structure leaves Spadafor nowhere to go within the nonprofit's hierarchy, but that doesn't bother her.

"I'm very happy here," she said. "I'm privileged to have this job and humbled by it."