

Feb. 24, 2008  
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

## **CEO of St. Jude's Ranch gets Bar Association honor**

### **Spadafor named one of top 20 female lawyers with business expertise**

By JENNIFER ROBISON  
REVIEW-JOURNAL

The American Bar Association has included a Southern Nevada attorney among the nation's top 20 female lawyers with business expertise.

Christine Spadafor, chief executive officer of St. Jude's Ranch for Children in Boulder City, was among hundreds of attorneys considered for inclusion in 2008's DirectWomen, a program designed to identify female lawyers qualified to serve on corporate boards.

Spadafor is the only attorney from Nevada or Texas to win the honor, and she's the only representative from the philanthropic world. Other inductees into the 2008 class include attorneys with H&R Block, America Online and Ernst & Young.

Ralph Manning, chairman of the board of St. Jude's and a partner in the Dallas-based private-equity firm of Progress Equity Partners, nominated Spadafor for the honor partly because of the turnaround she's executed at St. Jude's, which also has two campuses in Texas.

The 40-year-old ranch for abused, abandoned and neglected kids hit hard times around 2001. It grew too quickly, Manning said, and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as well as the Asian tsunami of 2004, peeled away donors who would otherwise have given to the ranch. By 2005, St. Jude's was close to shutting down. It had two or three months' worth of cash on hand, and its operators weren't sure they'd even make payroll from week to week, Manning recalled.

So the charity's supporters asked Spadafor, a Harvard-educated attorney and turnaround expert in Boston, to consult with them on a plan to save the nonprofit. Her vision, a 112-point plan, took 18 months to implement. In April 2006, the ranch's board members asked Spadafor to come on full time as CEO. She accepted the job because of the example her parents set as philanthropists.

Today, the organization has turned a big corner. Its net assets have grown 29 percent, from \$9.2 million to \$12.9 million. After four consecutive years in the red, St. Jude's posted a \$1.5 million surplus in cash and in-kind donations for the fiscal year that ended June 30. The nonprofit has its first reserve account in its history, with a \$400,000 rainy-day fund. And St. Jude's has instituted merit bonuses for staff members who perform beyond expectations. For every dollar given to the group, 96 cents makes its way to the children, Spadafor said, and for the last two years, licensing agencies in Texas and Nevada have found zero deficiencies on-site at the ranches.

Manning credited Spadafor's varied background for her success with St. Jude's. As both a businesswoman and a former nurse, she's deft at combining fiscal responsibility and quality care-giving, he said. Plus, her law practice in Boston included work on parental-rights cases involving

abandoned and abused children, so she's familiar with the legal issues surrounding the 120 children at St. Jude's.

"With Christine's intellectual horsepower and experience, we are taking St. Jude's to a level much higher than we were equipped to reach historically," Manning said.

Spadafor's membership in DirectWomen could also advance St. Jude's.

Her classmates are already discussing making corporate contributions to St. Jude's, and there's talk of corporate fundraisers for the ranch's children.

Though part of DirectWomen's purpose is to find and cultivate female attorneys to serve on company boards of directors, the for-profit world doesn't appeal to Spadafor now.

"I'm very happy at St. Jude's," she said. "Children are the most important little shareholders I've ever had."

Contact reporter Jennifer Robison at [jrobison@reviewjournal.com](mailto:jrobison@reviewjournal.com) or (702) 380-4512.

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.lvrj.com/business/15918827.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1997 - 2008

Go Green! Subscribe to the electronic Edition at [www.reviewjournal.com/ec/](http://www.reviewjournal.com/ec/)