

Epworth Children & Family Services

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Pillar Of Strength Event Raises Record Donations to Help At-Risk Youth

*More than \$400,000 Raised for Epworth to Help Fund Youth Educational Programs
Program Honors **Sue Engelhardt** as Community “Pillar of Strength”*

For Immediate Release (Webster Groves, February 2010) — With at-risk and foster youth often struggling to earn their high school diplomas or GEDs, Epworth announces that more than \$420,000 was raised to develop and fund educational programs that allow youth to both complete and further their education.

The funds, raised for Epworth’s “Pillar of Strength” event earlier this month, are credited to the efforts of Sue Engelhardt, a long-time community volunteer and tireless children’s advocate. Hundreds of people attended the event, where Engelhardt received the 2010 Pillar of Strength Award.

“Sue is enthusiastic and absolutely correct that education is the key to success,” said Kevin Drollinger, MSSW, MBA, Executive Director of Epworth. “Because of her drive and commitment to the youth in our community, this year’s event honoring Sue raised more dollars than any other single event in the 145+ year history of Epworth. Because of her leadership and the efforts of many, these funds are a true investment in helping us to turn around the tide of high school drop-out rates.”

Engelhardt and her husband, Irl, issued the Engelhardt Education Challenge at the end of 2009, offering to match dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 given to Epworth Children and Family Services for the Pillar of Strength.

“Our hopes were that the Engelhardt Education Challenge would raise awareness of the need for improved educational programs for Epworth’s kids,” said Engelhardt. “By the sheer size of the dollars raised, and from those who came to the event on a snowy night and in a difficult economy, I think we were successful in motivating people to give generously to programs that could truly give children a future.”

Specifically, the Education Challenge was focused on increasing the high school/GED graduation rates and to increase the percentage of Epworth youth who enter post-secondary education. Funds raised will be used to enhance GED and academic software, provide education and transportation support, and encourage stronger parental participation in the lives of at-risk youth.

“We have to remember that these are children who have nowhere else to turn,” stressed Engelhardt. “They don’t have the full support at home like many of us had when we were younger. These funds, then, will truly give the children a future through education, because that is the key to breaking the cycle of despair.”

Engelhardt is a well-known community advocate. She has been a leader in both public accounting and brokerage industries and later turned her financial and business talents toward charitable causes related to children, education, and the performing arts. In 2004 she and her husband established The Engelhardt

Family Foundation. To date, the Foundation has distributed more than \$3 million to local and national organizations.

Long-time Epworth volunteers Anne Levitt and Kris Warner served as co-chairs of the Pillar of Strength event. The event included a video tribute to Engelhardt as well as a spirited "Raise Your Paddle for Education" that raised \$125,000 through the issuance of Youth Opportunity Program tax credits. KSDK-TV's Art Holliday served as program emcee. A one-of-a-kind necklace designed by Karen Reese also was raffled, garnering more than \$1,700 for educational programs.

The Honorable George Herbert Walker III, former US Ambassador to Hungary and the 2009 Pillar of Strength awardee, handed Engelhardt the 2010 award, saying, "What is a Pillar of Strength? Epworth's definition is someone who embodies the organization's mission so that all youth have the opportunity to find his or her strength to thrive in society. Sue Engelhardt cares so passionately and deeply about the children who are served by Epworth, contributing her time, her energy and financial resources to building a strong, thriving community. Our community is a better place because of her."

"There is never a time that we have lost sight of the fact that kids come first," added Engelhardt. "I am looking forward to seeing the results of the new education initiatives in improving high school graduation rates. That's what makes it all worthwhile!"

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Epworth Children & Family Services was established in 1864 and is based in Webster Groves, Mo. A founding member of the Child Welfare League of America, Epworth provides a wide variety of services to at-risk youth ages birth to 21 and their families. The organization offers intensive residential and day treatment programs for youth and is nationally recognized for its independent and transitional living programs. It also operates a youth emergency center with a 24-hour youth hotline and provides therapeutic counseling and educational services in its accredited school. Epworth is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and has the BBB wise giving seal. Epworth is a Charter Member of the Missouri Coalition of Children's Agencies, and is a proud member of the United Way of Greater St. Louis. For more information about Epworth, log onto www.epworth.org.