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Echo Foundation is catalyst for compassion

Each year, the organization reaches the community through speakers, programs.

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Bishop John Rucyahana, one of the humanitarians brought to Charlotte by the Echo Foundation, with Stephanie Ansaldo. Bobby Cochran photo -



Michael J. Solender for Neighbors of the City. His column is called 'neighborhoods'

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Learn about the Echo Foundation, www.echofoundation.org.

When Stephanie Ansaldo reflects on Charlotte, she sees a community with incredible talent, energy and generosity of spirit that wants to help others.

Ansaldo is the founder and president of the internationally recognized Echo Foundation, a nonprofit humanitarian organization whose mission is to sponsor and facilitate those voices that speak of human dignity, justice and moral courage.

Ansaldo established Echo in 1997 with seed money she received from humanitarian and Noble Laureate for Peace, Elie Wiesel.

She engineered Wiesel's visit to the Queen City that year after meeting him at a conference in Washington, D.C.

Ansaldo was so inspired by his message of personal responsibility and the impact that one person can have on the lives of others, she coordinated with the Charlotte chapter of the Jewish Federation, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and her employer at the time, Charlotte Latin School, in sponsoring Wiesel's visit to the Queen City.

Wiesel came to Charlotte in 1997 with a call to action to speak and act out against injustice wherever it existed. According to [he saw here to those ideals](#). He saw in Charlotte a community committed to taking action that recognized the importance of ir

world.

Wesel strongly encouraged Ansaldo to continue the work she started using the model for his visit as a template for work with other humanitarians.

Each year, Echo offers community education outreach through speakers, programs and curriculum development.

"It is critical that young people in our community have the opportunity to see role models and the power of what a single individual can accomplish," said Ansaldo. "This is precisely why we developed the Voices Against Indifference Initiative."

Through this initiative, Echo brings speakers and programs to Charlotte illustrating how one person can make a difference for humanity.

Over the past few years, Echo has brought humanitarians such as Partners In Health founder Dr. Paul Farmer, Rwandan Bishop John Rucyahana, Doctors Without Borders founder and former French Minister of Foreign Affairs Bernard Kouchner, Harvard African and African-American Studies Department Chairman Henry Louis Gates Jr., Columbia Earth Institute Director Jeffrey Sachs and human rights advocate Kerry Kennedy, she said.

"With each speaker, we develop unique educational components in order to bring about a shift in perspective and underscore the particular emphasis that these individuals bring to the community," Ansaldo said.

One such example is a student dialogue being held in early April at William A. Hough High School in Cornelius. Students and teachers from 15 area high schools will meet with Dr. Aaron Ciechanover, 2004 Chemistry Nobel Laureate, Echo's 2011 guest humanitarian.

Echo has developed an extensive curriculum guide examining Ciechanover's life and scientific research, the Middle East, religion and science, and education reform. Students will have the chance to ask questions and discuss with Ciechanover topics including the 21st century medical revolution and its implications for global society; the intersection of faith and science; career development; and individual responsibility.

"Recent results from the National Assessment of Education Progress show only one-fifth of high school seniors are proficient in science," said Ansaldo.

"Science holds the solutions to some of the most pressing problems facing society today. The Aaron Ciechanover Project will connect young people with this great humanitarian and scientist, inspiring them to consider science as a career and as a means of serving humanity."

Echo also highlights the work of regional community leaders and their contributions through the Echo Award Against Indifference .

This award was established to honor a member of the Mecklenburg County community who works "... with an eye towards peace, a heart filled with compassion and a voice against indifference, in order to remind our community of its highest ideals."

Previous recipients are the late Joe Martin, Bishop George E. Battle Jr., the late Sister Mary Thomas Burke, former Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt, former UNC Charlotte Chancellor Dean Colvard, former Bank of America Chairman Hugh McColl Jr., developer Howard C. "Smoky" Bissell, community volunteer Sally Dalton Robinson, business and civic leaders, Alan and Stuart Dickson, the law firm Ferguson Stein Chambers Grasham & Sumter, and philanthropists Sandra and Leon Levine.

Ansaldo was recently recognized for her excellence in career accomplishments and service to the community, state and nation by the UNC Charlotte, which inducted her into the school's Alumni Hall of Fame. She said she found the experience humbling yet very gratifying in terms of recognizing what she strives to accomplish through Echo.

"We have a personal responsibility to instill the quest for knowledge in our community's future leaders," said Ansaldo. We also need to develop a sense of compassion and internalize the belief that every living soul is worthy, whether they are children here in Charlotte with access to health care, potable water, education and shelter or those in underdeveloped nations such as Rwanda where these life basics are not readily available.

"Our young people need to know that each of us has something to contribute, a gift we can share with the world, and it is our responsibility to do that."

There could not be a better model for that concept than Ansaldo herself.

Michael J. Solender is a freelance writer who covers Charlotte neighborhoods. Have a story idea for him? Reach him at michaelsolender@gmail.com.



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