

PGA veteran Lehman charts professional, charitable goals

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Special for the Arizona Republic

Jan. 31, 2008 04:31 PM

The giver

Since their days in Minneapolis, spending time at the Children's Cancer Research Fund, Tom and Melissa Lehman have had a soft spot in their hearts, especially for children.

The PGA Tour star not only gives considerable dollars, but also plenty of his time to local charities. The Lehmans are helping the Phoenix Rescue Mission in downtown Phoenix, which is building a new \$12 million center for women and children called the Changing Lives Center.

Executive Director Jerry Sandvig said the Lehmans serve at the mission and have volunteered to be honorary chairmen for the building.

"Everything they do just comes from the heart," Sandvig said.

Said Lehman: "The number of women who are on the street with their kids is staggering. This center will allow them to live, be safe, and get back on their feet."

Another local charity, HopeKids, a Phoenix-based organization that provides support, care and services to children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases, is important to Lehman. HopeKids started in 2001 when Robert Cottrell, its founder and president, came up with the idea.

He invited Lehman to participate through an e-mail. "He told me he didn't want to get involved until he could get involved fully," Cottrell said.

It didn't take long. Lehman waited a few months, then dove in with both feet. Now he hosts an annual event at his house and has encouraged other PGA Tour players, like defending FBR Open champion Aaron Baddeley and local pros Arron Oberholser, Kirk Triplett, and Andrew Magee to get involved.

"It's like Make-A-Wish, but it's an ongoing relationship with planned events, things that kids look forward to on a weekly basis," Lehman said.

Cottrell said Lehman's impact has been huge. He believes all of the children who have visited the golfer's home have gone into remission. "The great thing about Tom," Cottrell said, "is that he has such a big heart. Seeing Tom with the kids is something special."

Lehman also is involved in Mentor Kids USA, a mentoring program for children who might be in trouble and need guidance

"It's a support group; a way to keeps kids' attitudes up," he said. "There are a million great charities out there, but these are the ones we've chosen to be involved with."