

PASSION PLAY

Renee Parsons hopes pledge to give away \$1 billion will inspire others to boost nonprofits

By ERIN THORBURN

In July, The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation initiated a \$1.6 million matching challenge in an effort to help the Girl Scouts Arizona Cactus-Pine Council complete its \$18 million Campaign for Girls. Who better to help champion such a cause that encourages leadership, education, life skills and friendship for girls and young women, than successful businesswoman and philanthropist Renee Parsons?

Parsons and her husband, GoDaddy founder Bob Parsons, have joined Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett in signing the Giving Pledge, an initiative by the billionaires to donate 50 percent of their wealth to charities.

As a seasoned professional instrumental in spearheading a number of local community causes, from aiding the disenfranchised and embracing the fight against HIV/AIDS to providing a platform for young homeless and foster children, Renee Parsons is helping to demonstrate the true meaning of transformative – in both foundational philanthropy and changing lives.

Az Business: What motivated you to start The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation?

Renee Parsons: We were strongly involved in philanthropy with GoDaddy. As Bob's role shifted out of day-to-day involvement, it was a perfect time for us to start our own foundation. Since we had already been involved within the Greater Phoenix community and had existing relationships with many organizations, we felt very strongly about supporting our local community and strengthening our existing roots.

AB: What can you share with readers about joining the Giving Pledge?

RP: We are proud to be the only individuals in Arizona to sign the Giving Pledge. We want to make sure that people understand that the giving pledge doesn't limit giving to \$1 billion or even half, but rather that the pledge is meant to be a public declaration of giving intended to inspire people to give what they can.

AB: How do you decide which charities or nonprofits you're going to support?

RP: When we started The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation, we knew we wanted to focus on continuing in the space we started in years back with GoDaddy. We wanted to remain working with underserved populations, education and children's issues and



RENEE PARSONS: "For us, it's important to concentrate on the less glamorous, but well-run entities that are in our wheelhouse and that share our core values," says the co-founder of the Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation, shown at the Bob & Renee Parsons Leadership Center for Girls & Women.

PHOTO BY MIKE MERTES, AZ BIG MEDIA

helping women and the homeless. Our umbrella now centralizes on three major demographics: critically wounded veterans, disenfranchised individuals and families living in poverty and the LGBTQ community.

AB: What does your foundation do best?

RP: One of our foundation's many success stories has been matching grants – one of the first ones was the \$1.5 million matching grant applied to the Southwest Center for HIV/AIDS. I've had the pleasure of seeing the Center evolve since it started eight years ago. It's a transformative gift that continues to make the impossible possible for a population that doesn't receive a lot of help.

AB: What other local causes are you championing this year?

RP: We feel fortunate to be working with Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona. In August, we announced a \$2.5 million grant to help expand their space and resources. This organization is set up to serve children who are homeless and kids within the foster care system, enabling them to use art in a therapeutic way. There is a lovely and touching rotating art exhibit in our office building. Each piece of art represents a child's heartfelt story. We also have the pleasure of continuing to work with the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Arizona. **AB**