

HUMANITARIAN

Stuart Roth



ASK ANY NONPROFIT LEADER IN LAKEWOOD RANCH ABOUT STUART ROTH AND A SIMILAR ANSWER WILL ECHO: HE'S A LIFE-CHANGER.

A unanimous nod of support helped Roth earn this year's Lakewood Ranch Community Fund (LRCF) C. John A. Clarke Humanitarian Award—an honor given annually to individuals that exemplify the highest ethical and professional standards.

As President and CEO of the Center for Faith and Freedom (CFF), a 1989-founded, faith-based charitable organization, Roth helps philanthropic groups tell their stories through multimedia broadcasts. Using the Center's three editing suites and two studios, Roth's award-winning Salt and Light Productions creates issue-based documentaries that are distributed nationwide. Roth donates his personal time, space and money to social causes—from homelessness to drug abuse—often leaving community organizers overwhelmed with gratitude.

Gail Clifton, volunteer executive director of the Sarasota Manatee Association for Riding Therapy (SMART), is one of them.

"Occasionally, in the lives of small nonprofits, there is a time where good fortune is bestowed in a surprising and unimaginable way. That is exactly what happened to SMART when we received a call from Stuart Roth a couple of years ago," Clifton recalls. "He called to say that he wanted to do a promotional DVD for us, at no cost to us. He had heard about our riding therapy program, and wanted to help get the word out about what we do. We truly couldn't believe that this man, who we didn't know, was willing to do this for us for free."

That's Roth's way. No Catch-22, just altruism.

Before Roth channels his energy and funds into projects like SMART, he first does a bit of meditating. He asks himself, "What are the most crucial issues in the community?" and "How can we help the organizations addressing those issues make a major impact?"

At the CFF, which is headquartered in Lakewood Ranch, Salt and Light enables charities to better communicate their missions to widespread audiences. Some beneficiaries include Easter Seals of Southwest Florida, Agape Flights, Habitat for Humanity and the Humane Society of Manatee

BY RACHEL STEADWAY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON LOCKWOOD

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County. The Center for Faith and Freedom received six Telly Awards in various categories in 2008; six more in 2009; and an additional five in 2010. Salt and Light Productions also won an Emmy from the Suncoast Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for “advanced media documentary” in 2009 and one for “current affairs documentary” in 2010.

Roth, who lives and works in Lakewood Ranch, handles the administrative and financial responsibilities of the Center. His background as a renowned constitutional lawyer (he earned his juris doctorate in 1980 from Mercer University School of Law in Macon, Ga.) gives him plenty of clout, as he has offered legal commentary on hundreds of TV shows and radio stations. This national pull allows Roth to speak with authority about local matters and be heeded.

“In the last year or so, I made the determination to get more mileage out of our work projects here,” Roth says. “We would be addressing our projects from the issue-based perspective, but we’d be doing more generic pieces and licensing them at no charge to other organizations.”

One example was a piece Roth’s production company recently did for the Safe Place and Rape Crisis Center (SPARCC)—a generic, five-minute segment about domestic violence that was used as a template for similar organizations throughout the country.

“We’re doing pieces on family-oriented issues because the family is the building block of society. That’s where my heart is,” Roth says. “And if your heart’s in that direction, there’s no shortage of organizations to help. We’re working on several pieces on homelessness, gangs and hunger in Florida.”

For Clifton, Roth took SMART, an all-volunteer group with a budget of less than \$150,000, to a thriving enterprise that now serves more than 250 children and adults each year (a 60 percent increase since 2008).

“In the grand scheme of things, we are just one, very small organization that Stuart has touched profoundly and

professionally,” Clifton says. “We know that he has given of himself, his assets and his talents to many, many organizations in our community and throughout the world. He is truly changing the world in a positive way, one nonprofit at a time.”

When Nick Drizos, a board member at the LRFCF, was sorting through nominations for the Humanitarian Award earlier this year, he saw the selection of Roth as a “no-brainer,” he says.

“I think you’d be hard-pressed to find a nonprofit in Sarasota or Manatee County that Stuart hasn’t assisted in some way,” Drizos says. “Every time we’ve ever needed anything from Stuart, there’s never been a question.”

Roth, who moved to Lakewood Ranch from Alabama in 2002, says receiving the award made him feel warmly embraced by his hometown.

“I’m very much involved in the community because I live, work and play here, and to be recognized by the community you live in is a very nice experience,” Roth says.

Veronica Brandon Miller, executive director of ShelterBox in Lakewood Ranch, wholeheartedly supported Roth’s nomination.

Because of Roth’s assistance, her organization currently saves about \$25,000 a year, which allows volunteers to provide more direct aid to those in need. A ShelterBox, which includes a tent for up to 10 survivors, a water purification system, blankets, a stove and other life-saving equipment, is estimated to cost \$1,000 to equip and deliver. Therefore, Roth’s donation is equivalent to providing shelter to 250 people annually.

“Mr. Roth’s support of our organization, and others like ours, doesn’t stop there,” Miller says. “Through his leadership, compassion and generosity, Mr. Roth exemplifies the qualities not only befitting of the Humanitarian Award, but also those of a philanthropist who endeavors to push charities to new heights.” **LWR**