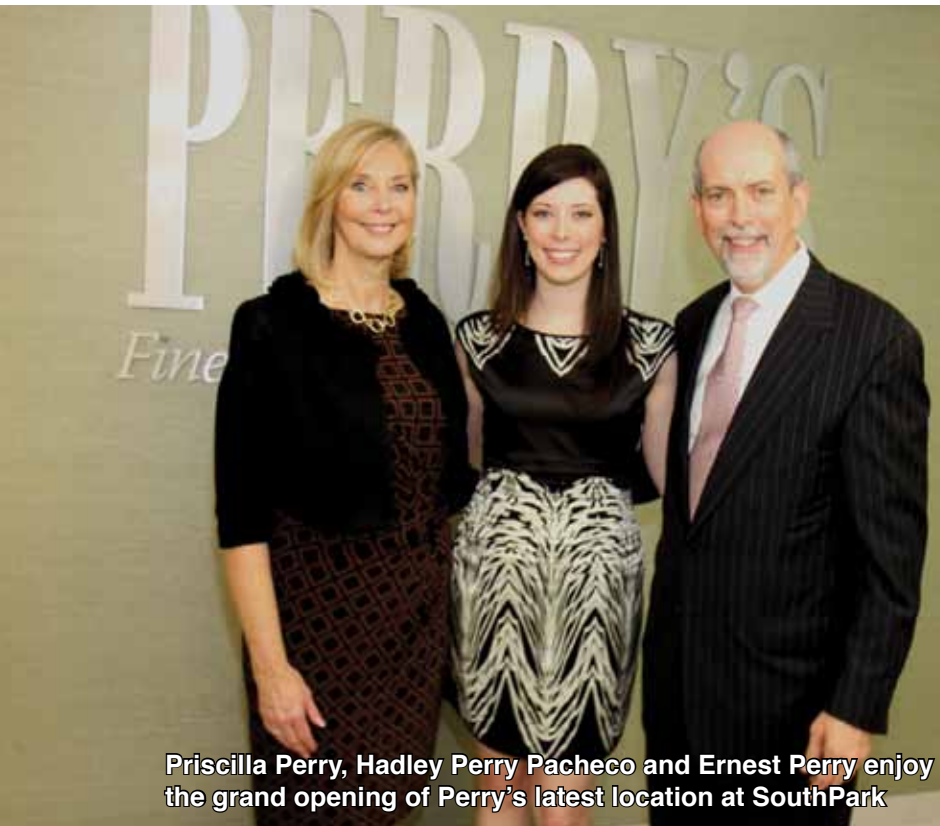


The Communitas Award: For selfless service to the community

Written by Katie Toussaint.

Photos by Treasured Events of Charlotte and PPT Photography.



Priscilla Perry, Hadley Perry Pacheco and Ernest Perry enjoy the grand opening of Perry's latest location at SouthPark

"I can get up before a crowd of a thousand people and do an auction and I never get nervous," Ernest Perry said. "Never even think about it. It's just a natural thing."

After more than 35 years of getting up before crowds as an auctioneer for nonprofit fundraisers, the owner and president of **Perry's Fine Antique & Estate Jewelry** at SouthPark has a gleaming addition to his store that isn't jewelry: the **Communitas Award for Leadership in Community Service**.

"I felt that my future was here in Charlotte."

The award—6.5 pounds of glass, cast metal and black nickel—rests modestly in Perry's reception room and symbolizes unselfish giving and the use of commerce to benefit the community. The award is the product of the **Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals'** recognition program to spotlight creative achievement while linking charities and organizations in beneficial partnerships.

Perry's business has been linked to charities from its beginning.

Striking gold

His big break came just after gold prices shot up in 1979 and he opened his first Charlotte store in 1980 with his two

brothers and his wife Priscilla, attracting an influx of people with old jewelry to sell. Perry began to gather ideas for charity fundraising.

Initially, his staff melted the material and returned it because it wasn't worth buying to sell in the store, but it was worth donating. He started collecting the unwanted items, from costume jewelry to watches, and selling them through dealers at flea markets and antique stores to benefit various charities.

"That's how I learned the antique and estate jewelry business," Perry said.

He learned to engage further with the public through jewelry auctions after he and one of his brothers went through auction school.

"It was a lot of fun—a lot of work—to put these things on," he said. They turned a profit, but he decided the method wasn't worth the hassle.

One day, Perry got a request from a nonprofit: to hold an auction for fundraising. "The next thing I know," he laughed, "I'm doing one every week for like 30 weeks a year."

After more than 35 years, his business and philanthropic involvement have converged. The store gained exposure and credibility with the opening of a location at SouthPark Mall—as the singular seller of used jewelry—plus the expansion to stores in Raleigh, N.C., Charleston, S.C., and Fort Mill, S.C. Ultimately, Perry elected to consolidate his business in SouthPark.

"I felt that my future was here in Charlotte," he said.

Giving precious time, precious metals

This year, Perry has shown commitment to the futures of Charlotte's nonprofits by giving his time, conducting auctions for **Allegro Foundation, Hinds Feet Farm's Checkered Ball, Komen Charlotte Affiliate, Laugh For the Cure, March Forth With Hope Foundation and Taste of the Nation Charlotte**, among others.

"If it's a legitimate charity," he said, "we will try to give something to every single one." After background checks, he gives from his inventory with the help of a staff member who coordinates their donated items and attends the auctions.

"We do everything but collect the money," Perry said.

Over the years, the company has donated time and treasures to charitable organizations in Charlotte including **Make A Wish Foundation, Second Harvest Foodbank of Metrolina, Fight Night for Kids, Allegro Foundation, Dress for Success and Cystic Fibrosis Foundation**.

The contributions in 2012 totaled more than \$115,000 worth of jewelry donated and sold to benefit these groups. According to SPARK Publications, Perry's involvement may have raised more than \$30 million total for nonprofits in the Carolinas.

He conducts 40 to 50 auctions each



Ernest Perry auctions off items at the 2013 World Tasting Tour

year, raising an average of \$50,000 per event. He has a strategy with fundraising guests.

"You go fast because you want to create excitement and create an energy there," he said, "but you have to go slow enough so people understand what you're saying because you're trying to raise money. And I keep reminding them: They're not making a bid, they're making a donation."

He has energy for more personal charitable projects as well. A former soldier, Perry created the **Silver for Soldiers** campaign in 2009 to benefit the USO and those returning from active duty in the military.

"They're not making a bid, they're making a donation."

"Instead of putting it in the melt box," he said of the old silver, "we put it in little bags and gave it to USO to allow GIs as they're coming through to go through it and just pick out something and have it to take to their girlfriend, or mother or sister."

Hearts of gold

Perry filtered this element of family into another project as well: This year, he and Hadley—his daughter and co-worker—launched the company's first annual 10 Weeks of Giving event. During the span of 10 weeks, the fundraising focused on 10 local nonprofits—one per week—with 10 percent of Perry's in-store jewelry sales donated to each organization. In total, the 10 weeks raised \$44,642.

Whether he is donating his time and his voice to Charlotte's nonprofits as an auctioneer, or giving auction items from his inventory, Perry emphasizes that charity involvement is intertwined with his family business. "It really goes back to the root of the company," he said.

And in the reception room of the company's current store, the Communitas Award sits and catches the light like one of his precious stones. But Perry isn't ready to sit still quite yet.

"I would be open to anything," he said, "but there are some auctions, as long as I'm physically able to do them, I'll do them forever because I just believe in the cause." ■



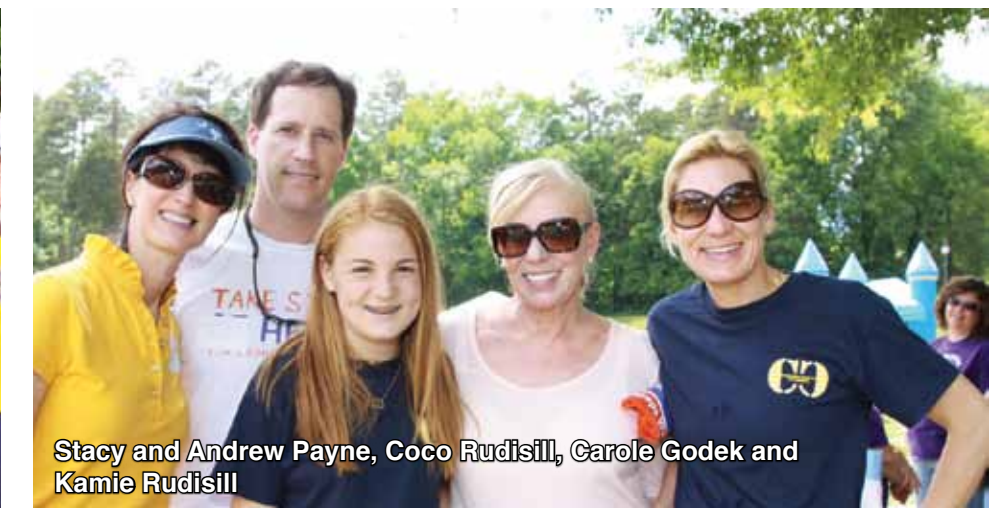
Ant's Army



Alex Funderburg, Maureen O'Boyle and Gilbert and Jane Browne



Stephanie Graham and her dog Sophie



Stacy and Andrew Payne, Coco Rudisill, Carole Godek and Kamie Rudisill



Intestinal Fortitude Group



Charlotte Take Steps Walk Starting Line

Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America Carolinas Chapter

Charlotte Take Steps Walk

A crowd of 1,200 people affected in some way by inflammatory bowel disease filled Freedom Park on June 1 for the **Charlotte Take Steps Walk**. A small percentage of the 1.4 million Americans influenced by these diseases, the participants raised more than \$200,000 to support the **Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America Carolinas Chapter (CCFA)**.

The walkers were welcomed by Maureen O'Boyle with WBTV Channel 3 News, who acknowledged the local sponsors, including Novant Health and Charlotte Gastroenterology and Hepatology, and introduced the national anthem singer.

"As a country," O'Boyle said, "more and more people are joining the cause of CCFA." "We're all united by hope that we're going to find a cure one day," said Alex Funderburg, CCFA Board Chair. "But more importantly we're united by resolve."

Nationally, CCFA is a nonprofit committed to finding cures for Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis by funding studies through major medical institutions and in underdeveloped research areas.

"It is only through CCFA that we're going to get a cure for Crohn's," said Gilbert Browne, Event Co-Chair. "No other organization is going to drive us to the finish line."

The Take Steps participants were led toward the Freedom Park finish line by Caleigh Brady, the day's 12-year-old "honored hero" who is battling Crohn's. "There is no cure for Crohn's disease," she said, "but I'm part of a growing number of strong people who are fighting for a cure." ■

get involved

Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America Carolinas Chapter
www.ccfca.org/chapters/carolinas · 704.264.0587

Written by Katie Toussaint. Photos by Dianna Augustine.
More photos at www.societycharlotte.com

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