

'Heart of gold' is honored by UDS

Don Martin's decades of devotion has brought friends and acquaintances — and \$1.5 million — to the aid of people with disabilities.

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Ask friends and family to describe Don Martin, and all the positive adjectives have one thing in common — the size. Towering at 6 feet 5 inches over the people who call him a "big ball of energy" and a "big guy with an even bigger heart of gold," Martin is a "people person" with an infectious laugh and an even more contagious love of philanthropy, friends Bill Kepner and Cindy Davidson say.

They are also quick to note one of Martin's biggest achievements: raising \$1.5 million for United Disabilities Services.

And now, what Kepner calls Martin's "really Herculean effort" has been officially recognized, too. Martin has been named the first winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award from UDS.

The award, which was created in his honor, recognizes the money he raised over 22 years of service.

In that time, Martin spearheaded fundraisers like annual Cadillac Dinners at the Revere Inn and a county-wide high school basketball shoot-out tournament that once raised \$70,000.

But his tireless endeavors were less about money than about securing a future of care for his daughter, Katie, who has cerebral palsy, and others with disabilities.

"I had a vested interest because of Katie," Martin said. "I wanted to see UDS grow because I felt that when she got out of college she would utilize the services like attendant care. I wanted to make sure through my participation that it would be a viable entity."

Katie Martin, who is now 27, a graduate of Millersville University and an employee at Schreiber Pediatric Rehab Center, said she uses attendant care services today.

But in the same breath, she points out her father's efforts extend far beyond the help she receives.

"He started when I was 5 or 6, and he knew I wasn't going to benefit from the services (until I turned 18)," she said. "He's helping me, but in the larger picture he's helping all people with disabilities be able to maintain independent lives."

Kepner, chief operating officer of UDS and "lifelong friend" of Don Martin, said Martin's efforts were especially remarkable given his solicitation technique of asking a little of many.

"I'm much better at asking 100 people for \$100 than I am asking for \$30,000 from a corporate executive," Martin said. "I wish I could just write big checks, but I'm more of a kind of guy that will just keep gnawing away at you to give."

Martin, of 440 N. George St., Millersville, amassed much of his support for UDS through friends and acquaintances he made over the years at work. He is the manager of The Barn Door restaurant in Millersville.

The modest Martin is quick to shift his achievements back to all the friends who have bolstered UDS efforts over the past two decades — and Kepner says that's characteristic of Martin.

"He doesn't like things to be focused on him," Kepner said. "It's not about the glory for him — it's about the results and the mission."

"He does it because he genuinely cares."

Katie Martin said the caring nature of both her parents — Martin has been married to high school sweetheart Sue for 32 years — has helped her become the independent adult she is today.

"I was treated like a normal sibling, which was the greatest gift," Katie Martin said. "I grew up thinking that I could do anything, and that was pretty awesome."

The Martin family includes her brother, Adam, 27, and sister, Laura, 22.

Don Martin said that while the award is "humbling," it could never trump the joy he gets from his children's happiness and stability.

"When you're a parent," he said, "that's what you work for."

