



Community Angel Award presented to Barbara Brister

by Nikki Rosenberg

The 2009 Community Angel Award, part of Houston Woman Magazine's Annual Nominate HER Awards program, was presented to Barbara Brister during a luncheon at the Hotel Icon on June 25. Evalyn Shea of Shea Writing and Training Solutions, nominated her friend for the award because of Brister's contributions to the Tourette Syndrome Association of Texas.

The two women met shortly after Brister moved to Houston in 2002 to seek better medical care for her two sons who had been diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome. At the time, Brister and her husband, Daryl, agreed to chair the Tourette Syndrome Association's annual golf tournament in hopes of revitalizing the event. Since Shea had helped with other charity tournaments, she quickly lent her skills to the event and, in so doing, formed a friendship with Brister.

Shea said, "Through the years I have watched as Barbara has taken care of her two sons and helped many families in Katy, the Houston area and throughout the state deal with Tourette syndrome. She has worked tirelessly to expand the golf tournament, increase outreach and education to the broader community about Tourette syndrome and raise money for TSA of Texas. The money she helped raise supports the annual camp for kids with Tourette syndrome — which is free to campers — and provides education and other support to families with Tourette syndrome."

Brister's assiduous efforts were motivated by her two sons who have Tourette syndrome. Although her eldest son, Brenton exhibited some symptoms of TS, his doctors and teachers did not think he fit the typical profile. Over the course of two years, the child endured numerous tests to rule out other possibilities. Once the diagnosis was confirmed, Brister began learning as much as possible about the disorder. When her younger son, Ethan, began showing signs of motor tics, his diagnosis was much easier to resolve.

Brister recalled, "While my husband worked here in Houston for about three months prior to our move from Louisiana, I was teaching first grade. It was quite busy and tiring to juggle everything with two boys diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome. Leaving behind family and friends, of course, was not easy. We're still close enough in miles to stay connected. By making our home in the Katy area, we soon made new friends from within the church, neighborhood, and community."

Within that community, Brister found only one thing lacking — a TS support group. In order to fill the need, Brister and her husband petitioned the TSA of Texas to become support group leaders in the area. Six years later, the Katy group is still thriving,

providing support, encouragement, education and get-togethers for families dealing with TS.

Brister said, “With monthly support groups, phone and email support, state-wide activities, board meetings, advocacy, du Ballon Rouge Weekend for Kids at Camp for All and our two major fundraisers — the annual gala held each January and the annual golf tournament held each October – I have been able to stay involved and help others, and at the same time, find the encouragement I need to face daily struggles. Not only has it been a pleasure to coordinate the support group, but friendships have developed because of it. It’s a joy to speak with others, and many times just listen about the ups and downs they face.”

Brister is responsible for many of the resources now available to TS families. In addition to forming the Katy support group, she has helped make it possible for children with the disease to live fairly normal lives.

She successfully petitioned the public school system to allow her sons the opportunity to be educated in public school, despite their having advanced, complex Tourette syndrome. Eventually, Brister began educating teachers, administrators, counselors and parents at other schools about the tics and other behaviors associated with TS. For the past several years, Brister has also traveled around the country sharing information about the disease.

Brister said, “Educating others about TS is an on-going process which is more easily done when one is open to hear, learn and put into practice the information presented. Educating, instead of allowing ignorance and intolerance to continue, is a must in our school systems.”

Through her compassion, empathy and generosity of time and spirit, Brister has become a true angel to Houston’s Tourette syndrome community and to others dealing with the disorder far beyond the boundary lines of our big city.