

An Organizational Priority

An Interview with
Nancy Reinsdorf, President, Chicago Bulls Charities

EDITORS' NOTE Nancy Reinsdorf has held her current post since 2012. She received her degree in political science from Roosevelt University. After college, she spent 10 years as a film producer, doing commercials and public service announcements.



Nancy Reinsdorf

ORGANIZATION BRIEF In 1987, the Bulls founded a nonprofit organization to help their community, especially where Chicago children are concerned. The charity, which was long known as CharitaBulls, was formed with the mission to enhance the lives of Chicago's youth by actively supporting educational, recreational, and social programs. In 2012, the team introduced a new name and refined focus for their charitable giving activity. Now operating under the name Chicago Bulls Charities (bulls.com/community), the team charity places particular giving emphasis on youth education, youth health and wellness, violence prevention, and military and first responder support.

How important is the family feel for the Chicago Bulls organization, and how do you maintain that culture in such a large organization?

Family is very important to the Chicago Bulls, and we work hard to create and sustain that culture. Our staff spends many hours together between games and events, so a positive, supportive environment is important to us.

We focus on culture when hiring people. It's something we also focused on as we designed and constructed a new office and a new practice facility. The new office features communal spaces that create a more collaborative work environment. Our team practice facility includes a large kitchen/lounge area and other spaces that serve as natural gathering places for our players and coaches.

You were a film producer prior to joining the Bulls. What excited you about leading Chicago Bulls Charities?

When I worked in film, I felt every element played an important role in telling the story. The set, the score, the cast, the script – each one was a vehicle. But I didn't think about these things individually – I couldn't make decisions for the entire project going element by element, scene by scene. I had to take the time to link and layer the elements to see how things came together,

or didn't, for the entire project. I love that we use the same approach at Chicago Bulls Charities as we create new relationships and develop outreach activities. We recognize the importance of each aspect of what we do – details matter – but we know that everything must fit together to form a cohesive unit to make the most sustainable impact. We knew that taking this approach meant we would have to be more strategic in our thinking and more discerning with our choices.

The end result has been the creation of a strong, defined organizational approach to community outreach that has allowed us to put our resources toward programs that will have the greatest impact.

Would you discuss the importance of community service and philanthropy to the culture of the Chicago Bulls?

Giving back to the community is an organizational priority. The Chicago Bulls have a strong history of contributing time, materials, resources, and financial donations to organizations that share the team's commitment to our areas of charitable focus. We were the first team in the NBA with a Community Relations department, and more recently we were named the inaugural ESPN Sports Humanitarian Team of the Year in 2015.

Throughout the 2015-16 season, the Bulls hosted more than 200 community events that impacted more than 87,000 Chicagoans. Our front office staff, along with corporate partners and community organizations, volunteered at 30 events with over 700 total volunteers.

With so much need in the community today, how do you decide which issues to support?

In 2012, the team assessed our philanthropic resources and role in the community and sought to add more definition to community goals and objectives. Through those efforts, we established a set of focus areas: youth education, youth health and wellness, violence prevention, and military and first responder support. The suggestion of violence prevention came out of conversations with our players about what was important to them.

Today, as we build relationships with our community partners, we have a method in place to give ourselves the greatest

opportunity to succeed. We start by determining our shared objectives and making a commitment to collect data and measure outcomes, and we adjust as needed. This approach helps us keep our work focused and allows us to grow partnerships that are truly making a difference.

Would you highlight some of the programs that the Chicago Bulls are involved in?

We have partnered with the Chicago Police Department and the local nonprofit Youth Guidance's Becoming A Man (BAM) program with a series of community basketball tournaments where Chicago police officers play alongside Chicago teens. Our players, coaches, and team leadership also participate. After the games, the group discusses issues affecting them and violence prevention efforts in our city. We also work with Youth Guidance's Working on Womanhood (WOW) program on events and programming.

We participated in NBA FIT Week at the end of January where we held basketball clinics and provided meals to families in need. We also support a weekend basketball league with Mercy Home called "Hoops to Homework" that started with an NBA-style draft at the end of January.

We honor first responders, local veterans, and active-duty service men and women through year-round programs and events, including the NBA's Hoops for Troops initiative. For example, we work with smoke alarm provider First Alert and the Chicago Fire Department to host fire safety events at local schools.

In addition to these programs, we provide financial grants to support community partners in our areas of focus.

How do you keep the players inspired and engaged in the Bulls' charity efforts?

Our players inspire us! When someone joins our team, and again at the start of every season, we meet with every player to learn what they are passionate about and what they want to do in the community. We build a lot of our programming around those conversations, but I love that our players also come to us throughout the year with ideas. Our players really like to engage, whether that means coaching a team at a BAM/CPD tournament, making a vision board with high school seniors, or hosting a panel discussion on goal-setting. ●