



Redbook Heroes: The Strength and Spirit Awards

"I heard a voice that said, 'Move.'"

"I heard that voice that said, 'Move.'" That was the moment when Strength & Spirit Award-winner LaTosha Brown knew she had to act to help the forgotten victims of Hurricane Katrina. She followed the call, and so did all of this year's REDBOOK Heroes--some of them people in the spotlight, and some of them people in your neighborhood. Read on to learn how nine women and one amazing man are building homes, building girls' self-esteem and women's self-determination, building a healthier planet--and building a better future, for all of us.

This year REDBOOK honors:

Salma Hayek

Leading the Charge Against Domestic Violence

Molly Barker

Filling Girls' Spirits With Strength and Self Esteem

Maria Menounos

Challenging Hollywood Stars to Take Action

Harry Connick, Jr

Rebuilding Lives Through the Sound of Music

LaTosha Brown

Coming to the Aid of Forgotten Katrina Victims

Lindsay Nohr Beck

Helping Cancer Patients Who've Cheated Death Go On to Create a New Life

Julia Louis-Dreyfus

Working to Save the Planet -- and Showing How Easy It Can Be

Jada Pinkett Smith

Giving Parents the Resources They Need So That All Kids Can Thrive

Katherin Chon and Tina Frundt Freeing Women Forced Into Sexual Enslavement

Read on to learn how they're making a difference, and how you can too. LEADING THE CHARGE AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

"Every time somebody hits a woman it's like they're hitting me," says Salma Hayek. That's how passionate the actress and activist is about fighting domestic violence. And that's why she's the national spokesperson for Avon's Speak Out Against Domestic Violence program, a million-dollar initiative to raise awareness about this brutal epidemic, which will touch 31 percent of American women during their lifetime.

Hayek's also using her voice to change policy: She lobbied the Senate last year to renew the Violence Against Women Act, which allocates funding to train police officers and prosecutors; pay for victims' legal counsel; and study how victims are affected by unemployment, kidnapping, and immigration laws. "We cannot tolerate a world in which one in three women is or will be a victim of domestic violence," Hayek said in her July 2005 testimony before the Judiciary Committee. "One of the dangers with this issue is that most of us say, 'That's not my problem.' In reality, it affects our whole society, because we are all connected."

Hayek's commitment to this issue doesn't stop at the United States border. In the last year, she's donated more than \$75,000 to domestic violence shelters in her Mexican hometown, Coatzacoalcos, and its neighbor Monterrey. And her commitment to women transcends boundaries of race, nationality, age, or any other superficial divide: "Body image and domestic violence are all of ours, these issues," says Hayek. "The limitations that are put upon us and that we put upon ourselves keep us from being all that we can be. I really think it's important that women have this kind of unity so we can support each other and love each other." Once we do, she adds, the possibilities are endless: "Women are not in charge of the world. Why not? We are the majority of the world. If we got together we would be so powerful."

Hayek insists that women, even those who've been victims of domestic violence, already have more power than they know. "What I can say to women is that there are always a hundred choices," she says. "You just have to work on your ability to see them. We can be in control of our lives. Women tell me all the time that I saved them. But I tell them, 'No. You saved yourself.'" --*Rebecca Davis*FILLING GIRLS' SPIRITS WITH STRENGTH AND SELF ESTEEM

Molly Barker remembers vividly the July night 13 years ago when she hit rock bottom. An alcoholic more or less since adolescence, Barker seemed like she had her life together: She held a master's degree in social work, had taught high school chemistry, and completed three Ironman triathlon competitions. But inside, she couldn't shake the overwhelming self-doubt that plagued her. That night before dropping off to sleep, Barker called her sister to say that she was considering suicide.

The next evening, Barker went for her daily run--it was then that she experienced an epiphany that would change her life. "My drinking was out of control, I had lost or quit every job I'd ever had, I couldn't even make rent, and I was running and training like crazy to deny to myself that I had a problem," says Barker, now 45 and a divorced mother of two. But that evening, "I suddenly knew I was a beautiful, powerful, and authentic woman--I hadn't realized that before. I decided to devote my life to helping girls feel good about themselves and avoid the mistakes I'd made."

Barker sought counseling to get sober, and in 1996, she founded [Girls on the Run](#). The organization brings together third- through eighth-grade girls for

12-week programs that combine training for a 5K race with self-esteem-boosting exercises. "I started drinking at 15 because I felt stuck in the 'girl' box--when you're struggling with being who you are as opposed to being who people think you should be," says Barker. "But I also started running then, and only on my runs did I feel like I was truly free to be myself. Girls on the Run is about sharing that experience."

What began as 13 girls and Barker meeting on an elementary school track in Charlotte, NC, has exploded to more than 40,000 participants in 128 cities nationwide. Even the volunteer coaches feel the impact of Barker's mission and vision: One coach found the courage to leave her abusive husband after leading the girls through a lesson in standing up for themselves.

"We are changing many, many girls' lives," says Barker. "And my life, too. When I first started this, I felt like a little girl looking for a voice, and because of Girls on the Run, I've grown, and continue to grow, into the strong and competent woman I've always wanted to be." Meaghan Booth, a participant in last year's program in Boise, ID, reflected that feeling of empowerment in a poem she wrote for Barker about what she gained from Girls on the Run, which ends, "You've found your way/into the sky, you're in the spotlight/and now, you just fly." --*Lindsey Palmer*

CHALLENGING HOLLYWOOD STARS TO TAKE ACTION

Five years ago, as a fresh-out-of-college reporter, Maria Menounos spent several weeks in South Africa covering the AIDS epidemic for the teen news network Channel One. On camera, the former Miss Massachusetts Teen USA displayed her signature poise as she and her crew traveled to the country's most impoverished areas. But behind closed doors, she could barely hold it together. "I was hit with a tornado of emotions," says Menounos, 28, the daughter of Greek-immigrant parents who always taught her to put herself in other people's shoes. Menounos was especially jarred by the suffering of children: the 13-year-old boy she met who was caring for his HIV-infected mother; the infant orphan she held in her arms one day, and mourned at a funeral the next. "Right away," she says, "I felt the call to do something."

Once stateside, Menounos gathered clothes, toys, and school supplies to send to the orphanages and villages she'd visited. Still, she wanted to do something bigger. Together with a friend, director Keven Undergaro, Menounos founded Take Action Hollywood! (TAH!). As a correspondent for Today and Access Hollywood (who has also recently added actress and director--of the independent film *Longtime Listener*--to her resume), Menounos has been able to rally a host of Hollywood do-gooders to the wide range of causes that matter to her. She's tackled issues from girls' self-esteem to pet overpopulation (Menounos herself has adopted five rescue and shelter dogs), and she's currently raising money to produce a film on the AIDS crisis in South Africa. "Growing up the way I did, not speaking English, helping my parents sweep nightclubs to make ends meet," says Menounos, "I feel such an obligation to stand up for as many causes as I can. I don't want to leave anything out." --*Penny Wrenn*

REBUILDING LIVES THROUGH THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Harry Connick, Jr., always pours his heart into his music, but perhaps his latest single, "All These People," is perhaps his most impassioned composition yet. Recorded as a duet with Texas-born gospel singer Kim Burrell, the song (released on August 29, 2006, the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina) tells the tale of what the 39-year-old singer/songwriter saw on his native streets of New Orleans--the fear, but also the courage and tenacity of its survivors--in the days following the wrath of Katrina.

In an effort to help rebuild and protect the rich musical culture that defined the city for decades, Connick will donate 100 percent of the single's royalties (as well as a portion of the proceeds from the album *Oh, My Nola* and a second album, *Chanson du Vieux Carre*) to New Orleans Habitat Musicians' Village, a housing project created by Connick and fellow musician and friend Branford Marsalis. Their hope is to provide 250 to 300 homes for displaced musicians. "Music is the essence of New Orleans, and we adamantly refuse to surrender it to the wind and water," Connick has said. The Village, which consists of five city blocks, will also be home to the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music (named for the jazz legend, Branford's father), a place where future musicians can continue to flourish.

Connick is grateful that his commitment to preserving the city's musical tradition has struck a chord with other artists as well: The Dave Matthews Band recently made a \$1.5 million grant to the Musicians' Village. "Music is such a big part of the culture in New Orleans, and was in danger of dying out," says Connick. "And now others are helping us make sure that doesn't happen." --*Krista Bennett* COMING TO THE AID OF FORGOTTEN KATRINA VICTIMS

When Hurricane Katrina swept across the Gulf Coast last summer, LaTosha Brown, 36, felt that all she could do was pray. The images that pained every American--homes drowning in muddy water, families camped out on rooftops, and the elderly being pushed through the flood in wheelchairs--were especially searing to Brown, who grew up in Mobile, AL, where her mother and grandfather still live. Thankfully, they emerged from the storm unhurt. But Brown couldn't stop thinking about the countless other victims as she watched the news from her Atlanta home. "I didn't understand how human beings could allow other human beings to suffer like that," Brown recalls. "I didn't want to be angry about it." But she was.

For the first time in her life, the 15-year grassroots and political organizer, who's a single mom of one, felt paralyzed. Then, on day four of watching the horror unfold, Brown says, "I heard that voice, saying, 'Move.'" She knew from talking with friends and fellow activists that Mississippi and Alabama towns like Pascagoula, Escatawpa, and Bayou La Batre were also devastated by Katrina, but they were being largely overlooked because of the nation's focus on New Orleans. So along with a few friends, Brown created a website for updates on Gulf Coast relief efforts, and devised a plan to fill a van with food and water, and drive it to survivors in rural communities.

Brown's first fund-raising success was with the Black Leadership Forum. They didn't hesitate-- and committed \$10,000. That, along with \$5,000 from Brown's own savings, transformed that single van into two transfer trucks with 300 tons of food and supplies, which were delivered to survivors in 15 communities in three states. Brown eventually dubbed her group of friends and volunteers [Saving Our Selves](#).

Buoyed by what Brown calls "miracle after miracle" (including a \$60,000 contribution from filmmaker Michael Moore and the donated time of 2,000 volunteers), S.O.S. has thus far helped 5,000 Gulf Coast Katrina survivors get back on their feet--providing basic prescription drugs and triage, weekly food and supply deliveries, and temporary or permanent housing. But Brown says she's the one who has gained the most from S.O.S., calling the work she does "transformative giving." "When I saw how vulnerable people were even before Katrina, I thought, How did we let it get this bad? Why wasn't I down here before?" she explains. "I realized I'd been complacent."

To provide lasting relief for survivors, S.O.S. has added environmental cleanup, emergency preparedness, and basic human-rights education to its initiatives. "I would love to take credit for all of it, but I can't," says Brown. "This is something remarkable that God has worked through me. All I did was show up." --*P.W.* **HELPING CANCER PATIENTS WHO'VE CHEATED DEATH GO ON TO CREATE NEW LIFE**

Lindsay Nohr Beck always knew she wanted to have children. But her dream was nearly destroyed after she was diagnosed with tongue cancer seven years ago, when she was just 22. At Beck's urging, her doctor finally disclosed that treatment--surgery, chemotherapy, radiation--would likely leave her infertile.

Beck immediately started researching ways to preserve her fertility, and found that Stanford Medical Center was running a relatively new egg-freezing program for cancer patients. Beck signed up, and had 29 eggs removed from her ovaries two days before she started chemo. "My fertility treatments gave me a reason to fight," says Beck. "Knowing that I might be able to have children one day meant that I could live the life I'd always imagined."

In the following months, Beck discovered that few cancer patients knew that chemo could lead to infertility, or were able to afford the egg-freezing procedure. "I knew that there were fertility risks *and* options, so I couldn't imagine going another day without spreading the word," says a now cancer-free Beck.

In 2001, Beck launched [Fertile Hope](#) in New York City. Her organization is dedicated to providing reproductive information, support, and hope to cancer patients, as well as lobbying Congress for access to fertility treatments for those with cancer. Fertile Hope also helps defray the high cost of fertility procedures by providing free drugs and discounted medical services--thanks in part to partnerships with pharmaceutical companies, sperm banks, and reproductive centers. For qualifying cancer patients, the cost of egg and embryo freezing is lowered from as much as \$10,000 to about \$3,000, and sperm freezing from around \$1,500 to \$150.

Beck herself, now 29, has finally realized the dream that she works to help other cancer patients preserve: She and her husband, Jordan, welcomed daughter Paisley in June. Says Beck, "This is truly why I wanted to survive!" --*Tara Rummell Berson* **WORKING TO SAVE THE PLANET -- AND SHOWING HOW EASY IT CAN BE**

For Julia Louis-Dreyfus, going green isn't just another Hollywood trend; it's her passion. In the early 1990s--long before Leo and Cameron cruised through the Hollywood Hills in Priuses--the 45-year-old two-time Emmy winner and her husband, Brad Hall, were already working to clean up the Santa Monica Bay. "We live near the ocean," says Louis-Dreyfus, "and my kids couldn't swim on certain days, and I thought, What the hell is that? It was so incredibly wrong that our city was defiling this extraordinary gift."

Since then, she's helped raise millions of dollars for environmental organizations such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Waterkeeper Alliance, and the Trust for Public Land. She's also lobbied California legislators for bills forcing the state to buy fuel-efficient cars for its fleet, and to allocate \$500 million to clean up Los Angeles's water supply.

And Louis-Dreyfus lives by her principles: In 2003, she and her family (she and Hall have two sons, Henry, 14, and Charles, 9) built an eco-friendly house that's powered by solar panels and made largely of recycled materials. She drives a hybrid car (as does her character Christine on *The New Adventures of Old Christine*), buys organic food, and spent a recent vacation in Chile urging politicians there not to dam the Futaleufu River in Patagonia, which would kill the river's trout and cut off water to other wildlife.

It is easy being green, Louis-Dreyfus says: "There are small things we can do that make a gigantic difference." One example: switching from regular paper to postconsumer recycled paper, which you can get at any office supply store. "My only problem with the current buzz about global warming is that it makes people feel so helpless, when there's enormous potential for change," she says. "It sounds highfalutin, but it's not just about saving the birds and the trees, it's about saving ourselves." --*R.D. GIVING PARENTS THE RESOURCES THEY NEED SO THAT ALL KIDS CAN THRIVE*

Jada Pinkett Smith doesn't want to be a role model for anyone's kids but her own. Sure, she's proud of her work as an artist and activist, but she wishes that instead of pointing to celebrities as their inspirations, more young people would say, "My mom, or my grandmother, or my aunt is my role model." That's why she and husband Will Smith formed the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation: to strengthen and support all families by working with grassroots organizations that promote inner-city development and youth education.

"Will and I both grew up in cities where people needed a lot of help," says Pinkett Smith, whose grandmother, a social worker and community leader, urged her to volunteer at soup kitchens, interact with the homeless, and help anyone less fortunate when she could. "Thanks to my family, I've always been an advocate for change," says Pinkett Smith. "It's in my blood."

Each year, the couple's foundation donates millions of dollars to organizations like the Healthy Babies Project, a Washington, D.C.-based program that educates expectant moms about the importance of staying smoke-, drug-, and alcohol-free. They also support initiatives in Philadelphia (where Will grew up) and Baltimore (Jada's hometown) that help unwed mothers finish high school and attend college. And Pinkett Smith recently participated in a documentary for Just Think, a San Francisco-based organization that teaches kids to lead healthy, responsible, independent lives.

"We need to teach our children that they'll constantly have outside influences, but their constitution has to be strong enough to protect their own integrity--no matter what's out there," says this committed mom. "That's how you help a child create who they want to be." --*T.R.B. FREEING WOMEN FORCED INTO SEXUAL ENSLAVEMENT*

Katherine Chon had never even heard of human trafficking when, in her senior year at Brown University, she read about six South Korean women who'd been forced into prostitution at a massage parlor near her apartment. "It really hit a nerve that they were my age and ethnicity," says Chon, 26. "I felt a passionate urgency to help."

Chon's passion and urgency are just what's needed to fight this growing criminal industry: Each year, an estimated 800,000 people--70 percent

female and 50 percent children--are trafficked, according to a Department of Justice report; 17,500 end up in the United States. Women come here from all over the world, expecting to work as masseuses or maids, but are forced into sex slavery instead. And Americans aren't safe either: 200,000 American children are at risk for sex trafficking.

In 2002, Chon and classmate Derek Ellerman founded the Polaris Project (the name alludes to the North Star that guided slaves along the Underground Railroad) in Washington, D.C. Their goals: to rehabilitate victims and lobby for stronger anti-trafficking laws.

It was the victim-assistance component that drew Tina Frundt to Polaris, where she works as the organization's outreach coordinator, manning a 24-hour hotline and recruiting survivors. At 14, she herself had been manipulated into leaving home by an older boyfriend who became her pimp, forcing her into prostitution. "I can't imagine doing anything besides being there for victims," says Frundt, now 32 and a single mom of two. "I'm giving these women what they desperately need: hope."

To date, Polaris has helped more than 100 survivors rebuild their lives from scratch, providing everything from clothing to employment assistance. The hotline has fielded 1,750 calls, and the organization has plans to keep expanding beyond its chapters in D.C. and seven other cities, including Tokyo. But Chon and Frundt's legislative efforts have *already* had far reaching impact. Polaris successfully lobbied for states, including Colorado, to pass anti-trafficking laws, and last year it helped convince Congress to amend the existing Trafficking Victims Protection Act so that it protects not only foreign nationals, but also U.S. citizens. "When we teach our clients about their rights, it's inspiring to see a real change in their eyes," says Chon. "They're finally getting the help they deserve." --L.P.