

Insurance 'cowboy' to the rescue

An agent in fight against child hunger

By DAVID GOWRIE
Staff Writer

Most professionals will do anything to avoid being labeled a "cowboy," but not Al Singer.

A collector of cowboy memorabilia, the Teaneck insurance agent once arrived at a birthday party dressed as the Lone Ranger — complete with white stallion.

Now the president of Singer Nelson Charlmers is taking the reins in a real-life heroic endeavor: contributing to the effort to eliminate child hunger in the United States.

One out of four children are at risk of going hungry before the end of each month, according to Feed The Children, a charity based in Oklahoma City.

"My wife and I have raised three children, and they never had to worry about food," Singer says. "We just think it's unconscionable

that in America, a kid would go to bed hungry."

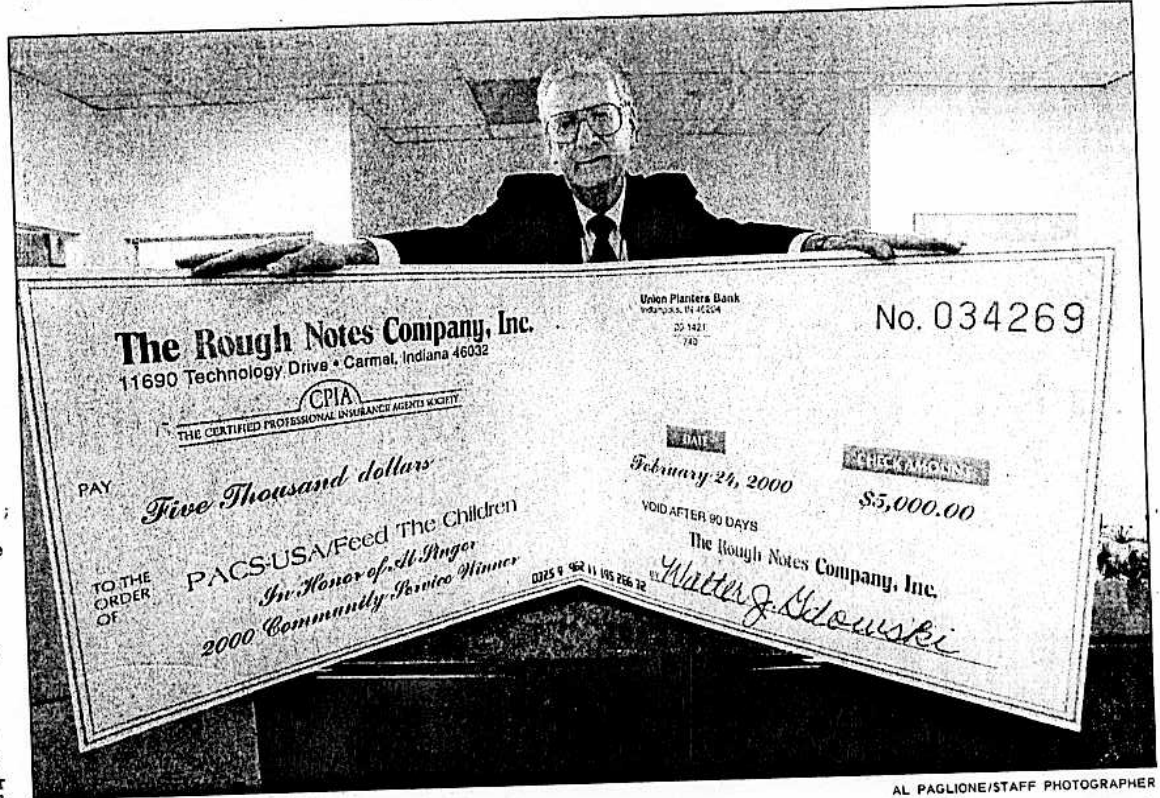
In 1997 Singer formed People Against Children Starving, a cooperative program between his firm and Feed The Children.

Singer's close involvement with the Teaneck community over 38 years has provided a base for his charitable work. His business, which generates \$4 million in commissioned income, has drawn support for PACS-USA food projects from a client list that includes 500 metropolitan-area accountants, law firms, doctors, and other professionals.

Singer says every \$5,400 PACS-USA raises pays for the delivery of a truckload of food — up to 35,000 pounds of items such as pasta, beans, vegetables, and other foodstuffs, to be distributed to charities and community pantries across the nation.

The Teaneck cowboy and his staff of 30 at Singer Nelson Charlmers recently won the first Certified Professional Insurance Agents/Rough Notes Community Service Award for their work with PACS-USA. The award is to be given annually.

Q. Does this charity work help improve the public's view of insurance agencies?



AL PAGLIONE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Teaneck insurance agency president and cowboy aficionado Al Singer displaying a copy of a check presented by his firm to

Feed the Children. "We just think it's unconscionable that in America, a kid would go to bed hungry," Singer says.

A. That's what we are trying to turn around. With all the bad press about the industry, we feel that this is something that can make us look and be what we really are.

Q. Detail your business.

A. Our job is to shop the market and to get the best price and the best coverage for our clients. We place them with the larger, A-rated insurance companies, like Chubb and New York Life, and we collect a commission from the insurance company for placing the business.

Q. How did you get involved with Feed The Children and PACS-USA?

A. We were looking to give back, and one day I was watching TV and I saw a program devoted to feeding hungry children. I found out there were about 13 million children in the United States that go to bed hungry.

I called Feed The Children and asked if they would joint-venture with us, where, if we raised the money, that the food would just go to the United States. Together, we started People Against Children Starving USA.

We had our first drop in Hackensack in December 1998. We did another in South Jersey and a truckload in Harlem, and one in California. And now we are doing two truckloads in Teaneck at Fairleigh Dickinson University in June.

Q. What is your goal with PACS-USA?

A. We know of a lot of agencies that get involved in all kinds of charities. We want to try to get the insurance industry to focus on eliminating hunger in the United States, and not allow one child to go to bed hungry. And that's what we are moving towards.

Q. What are the logistics involved in this activity?

A. The food comes to Feed The Children from major manufacturers. We get a date and time and place, and raise the money to bring the trucks to the drop sites, and we distribute it together with Feed The Children to the local charities.

It takes a lot of letters and phone calls and media coverage, getting the word out all over the country. We contact presidents and chairmen of various insurance agencies and other companies. We canvass anyone who's got the wherewithal and the dollars that they can commit to this cause.

Q. How successful has the program been, and how do your employees react?

A. It's been very successful. We've already delivered over 100,000 pounds of food. We get many letters and thank yous from people. And our employees are thrilled. We get tremendous support. They put in the time. It's a ton of work, and it's all done on a volunteer basis, strictly.