

'Giving back' more than just words to Magic, owner

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I am unabashedly a fan of the NBA and the Orlando Magic. I grew up in a house with a father who was a coach in the early days of the NBA. Basketball was part of our lifestyle. I love the game but also what the game does for society.

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I have watched throughout the tenure of David Stern as commissioner of the

NBA as he helped the league develop into an organization that shows how it cares in a very public way.

NBA Cares is the most extensive community service program in sport and embraces every NBA city in addition to providing assistance in the international community in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. Stern has been at the forefront of so much of that global expansion. I was part of the NBA's first trips to South Africa in 1993 and 1994 and can attest to the extraordinary impact.

I watched as Rich DeVos bought the Orlando Magic in the early 1990s and saw how an individual team like the Magic gives back so much to the community.

My life's work involves using sport as a vehicle to bring about positive social change in communities. Stern and DeVos are role models for how to do that in the most meaningful ways. Rich's children, led by son-in-law and Magic President Bob Vander Weide, have picked up the mantle and are following in his footsteps.

The DeVos family's impact on the Central Florida region has included more than \$60 million in local gifts in the last eight years including \$1 million when hurricanes devastated the area in 2004.

He gave \$2.5 million to UCF to start the DeVos Sport Business Management Graduate Program to educate a generation of people on how to use sports to bring about social change. I am lucky enough to be the chair of that program. I also helped found the National Consortium for Academics and Sports, which serves communities across America and helps athletes complete their education. Facing a funding crisis, Rich rescued the NCAS with a \$6.5 million gift.

Rich DeVos sets the tone for the Magic staff, which donated 3,400 volunteer hours last year. DeVos graduate students gave more than 4,000 hours of service in Central Florida. DeVos is the role model for all of them.

Within the first week after Hurricane Katrina, the Magic took players and staff twice to Baton Rouge, La., where most of the evacuees had been settled in shelters. It was America's greatest modern natural catastrophe. I was on those trips and watched hopeless survivors rally when they saw that a team from another city was there to pitch in.

Since then, our DeVos students have spent 18 weeks working in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans rebuilding homes. The NBA had its 2008 All-Star Game in New Orleans, and 2,500 NBA-related volunteers did a day of service helping the city.

Heart of the city

As plans were approved for a new arena for the Magic, called the Orlando Events Center, DeVos and the Magic were leaders in other major civic building projects starting with a \$10 million gift for the new Orlando Performing Arts Center. DeVos and the Magic are building five community centers to give young people much-needed after-school programs at a cost of \$12.5 million.



NBAE / GETTY IMAGES

The \$480 million Orlando Events Center, home to the Magic, is scheduled to open in 2010.

When the Magic's original arena was built and opened in 1989, the development did little to extend much-needed resources and employment opportunities to minorities in Orlando. The African-American community in particular was very critical. The Magic and the city promised it would be different with the new building and developed a plan to make that happen.

I have long admired Rev. Randolph Bracy, a community leader and president of the Orlando NAACP. When the new arena was approved, he put the city and the Magic on notice that much more was expected. The building is well under way now. Bracy and the NAACP have staged protests outside before several playoff games saying the Magic and the city have not lived up to their promises to the African-American community. But promises cannot only be about the African-American community but all minorities as well.

When the first building was erected, the demographics of the city were largely white and African-American with a smaller Latino base. Like much of Florida, the Latino population is growing fast, jumping from 8.2 percent in 1990 percent to 23.7 percent in 2009. Orlando and Atlanta have two of the fastest-growing Latino populations. It is imperative today that any discussion about minorities be inclusive of all racial groups. When you look at it from that perspective, the Magic and the city are not only not breaking promises but are surpassing them.

According to Magic COO Alex Martins, "The city of Orlando has a forward-thinking blueprint which outlines a goal of 24 percent for minority participation for the Orlando Events Center. To date, 34.6 percent of the contracts, equaling \$77.8 million, have been awarded to local minority and women business enterprises — including companies in Parramore. More than 120 minority and women firms are under contract (46 African-American-owned, 28 Hispanic-American-owned, 17 Asian-American owned, 37 women-owned), and since Feb. 13, 25 workers have been hired via the city work force program, 24 of which have been from local West Orlando neighborhoods." Parramore and West Orlando are largely African-American communities where poverty is all too common.

There is something about sports that brings people together and heals communities. DeVos knows that and clearly states that is one of the reasons he bought the Magic.

Rich DeVos and the entire Magic organization are erecting a new building not only with the physical materials needed to create an architectural gem for the city but with the spirit and sense of community that will make the new arena a living, beating heart for the city.

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