

# Better Together

By REBECCA L. RHOADES

**H**istorically, commercial real estate has been a male-dominated industry, so those women who do enter the field often have to work twice as hard to succeed. Many of those who make it to the top credit their success to strong female role models who supported their choices, strengthened their confidence and allowed them to believe in themselves and their career goals.

AZRE Magazine caught up with three female CRE professionals who spend much of their free time giving back to underprivileged, addicted or simply down-on-their-luck girls and women. Their philanthropic work helps build strong families and communities and encourages future generations to follow their dreams, no matter what challenges they may face.

**Judi Butterworth**, senior vice president, Orion Investment Real Estate

Butterworth has specialized in leasing and selling shopping centers for about 40 years. While her long list of professional achievements is impressive, her passion for helping others is equally as formidable. Shortly after moving to Phoenix in the 1980s, she began volunteering at Arizona Women's Education and Employment (AWEE, now part of A New Leaf) and created one of the organization's signature events, Cocktails and Clothes. Last year's soiree, held just days before the beginning of the pandemic in March, raised approximately \$75,000. Currently, Butterworth focuses on helping women and children through Phoenix Rescue Mission's Changing Life Center. She also teaches classes at

the Estrella Jail that give incarcerated women life and coping skills.

*Why is it important for successful women to help other women?*

"By some shred of luck, I've hung out with good people and was able to go to college, but I was a single mom, and I know what it's like to be tired, get no rest and have total financial responsibility. Women have such unique experiences because we can have babies and go through menopause, and we can empathize with each other's problems. Any woman who steps out of her comfort zone to volunteer will get way more out of it than she gives."

*Why do you focus your philanthropic efforts on addiction issues?*

"A lot of the women I teach don't understand that they have a debilitating problem. They're not stupid, but they've been brought up with parents who were addicts, they didn't have a strong father figure, or they were assaulted. I want them to understand that they have options. Being able to look at somebody face to face, share your experiences and give them hope — no amount of money can buy that."

*What advice would you give to someone who is interested in volunteering?*

"There's no downside to trying different activities. Volunteering is a great way to escape from the daily pressures that you can't otherwise get out of your head. When you're helping other people, you don't have time to think about yourself, and there's a magic to that."

**Dena Jones**, assistant vice president and director of marketing and digital solutions, Fidelity National Title Agency

Jones is a third-generation real estate professional who had philanthropic values instilled in her from childhood. After joining Valley Partnership in 2011, Jones began focusing more of her free time on helping others. Since 2013, she has served as chairman of the organization's community project and board of directors' liaison for its charitable work. In addition, she is involved with the Scottsdale 20-30

Judi Butterworth



# AFTER HOURS



Club's annual Brokers for Kids/Agents Benefiting Children event, which raises money for youth charities; serves on St. Vincent de Paul's board of young professionals, The Vinnies; and is on the board of the Care Fund.

## *Why is working with young people and giving back to the community so important to you?*

"It all started with my mom. I would volunteer with her during the summer at Sunshine Acres Children's Home, a place I serve and support today. I didn't grow up with wealthy parents, but they always taught me that no matter what you have, there's always something that you can give away. I learned that there's more to life than what you do on a professional level; that there's always other people in need."

## *Why is it important for successful women to help other women?*

"It always starts because that's what you want, right? We women in business have to stick together. We have to teach the next generation of women."

## *Tell us about some of your volunteer experiences.*

"A few years ago, the Florence Crittenton Girl's Ranch in Scottsdale contacted Valley Partnership because they did not have any usable outdoor space. We constructed beautiful gardens with seating areas, planters and a mural. We also added a heart-shaped labyrinth with hand-painted stones. Now, every time a girl goes through the home, she paints rocks with messages of positivity so future residents can walk through and feel

a sense of peace. At Sunshine Acres, we built a recreational field for the kids. When they show up there, they usually have a lot of anger issues, so seeing them play on the field and transform in a safe and happy environment is amazing. I never need to know who my work is going to affect, but when you get a call or hear a story about how someone's life changed or improved, it really makes you feel good."

**Julie Johnson**, executive vice president, Colliers International

Johnson has been in the CRE industry for about 30 years. It was through her volunteer work with Teach for America, which she began doing about 15 years ago, that she became involved with Girl Scouts. She frequently speaks to the scouts about her career as part of the organization's Camp CEO program. In addition, she works with low-income and at-risk kids through Phoenix Youth at Risk/New Pathways For Youth and she mentors young professional women through

NAIOP and the Urban Land Institute's Women's Leadership Initiative.

## *Why is it important for successful women to help other women?*

"If you read books or articles by successful people, they will almost always say that they had a mentor who helped them grow their career or find their purpose. A lot of the kids I work with can easily go in the wrong direction in life, so to help guide them in making choices that will be good for their future is important. I think that everybody, no matter what age, needs someone who is their supporter and advocate."

## *Is there anyone in your industry who has inspired your philanthropic work?*

"I am completely amazed by and admire everything that Judi Butterworth has done. Many years ago, she got me involve with AWEE. Her enthusiasm and great ideas for helping women encouraged me to begin donating some of my professional clothes to women who might need them for job interviews. The stories that I heard about the women and, later, some of the men who the organization helped were amazing. To be able to reach out to people who are in need, or who just need an opportunity, and be able to provide help really encapsulates why I volunteer."

## *What does giving back to your community give to you?*

"It gives me inspiration. It's so exciting to see the seeds of greatness in these young women and to help them become more resilient and overcome some of their adverse situations." ■■■



**Julie Johnson**