

Foundation honors former Chiefs player

Written by Linda Friedel

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Kathy Hofer likes her job, but more than that she appreciates the benevolent nature of her employer, who she sums up in one word.

“Phenomenal,” said Hofer, Olathe, manager of 68’s Inside Sports gym and sports facility. “There is no other word to really describe him.”

Hofer said her employer and owner of 68’s Inside Sports, former Kansas City Chief’s player **Will Shields**

, elevates the fitness center’s impact by encouraging employees and members to reach out and help people in need.

“To have someone who encourages that – I love it. That’s why I come to work,” she said.

Hofer can list the drives and awareness activities Shields, encouraged at his Overland Park fitness center this year. There was “Groovability,” a dance-a-thon for people in wheel chairs on Halloween day.

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Shields provided space for the Muscular Dystrophy Association to hold a “Lock-up,” using “bail” money to fund the program. “Sock it to Me” provided 675 pairs of socks for Operation Breakthrough, an agency that helps children. Safehome, which helps abused women, held a soccer tournament at the facility.

“He encourages us to think outside the box how to help the community,” she said.

Philanthropic events held at Shield’s 68’s Inside Sports reflect the spirit of his Will to Succeed Foundation, which has helped more than 100,000 individuals since its inception.

Shields’ philanthropic efforts will be recognized Thursday, Dec. 10, when the Southtown Foundation honors him at their 14th annual Celebration of the American Citizen Award luncheon at the Muehlebach Hotel Tower at the Downtown Marriott.

Proceeds from the luncheon will benefit the Will to Succeed Foundation and Southtown Foundation.

“I can’t think of any better person to be honored in something like that,” said

Anthony Phillips, Shawnee, chiropractic sports physician at 68’s Inside Sports. Phillips, a minority partner at health center, has served on Shields’ foundation for seven years.

“I think it’s only fitting,” he said. “We’ve gone from friends to business partners because of his ethics and the way he lives his life.”

Shields will not point to one single moment that sparked his interest in philanthropy, saying it was a chain of events and influences in his life beginning with his parents.

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His college football coach at the University of Nebraska, **Tom Osborne**, encouraged players to participate in Team Mates, an agency similar to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kansas City.

“I had good mentors growing up,” Shields said. “They raise you to think the right way.”

Shields said when he joined the Chiefs in 1993 the players had formed 17 other foundations.

“It made it easy as a rookie to be a part of the group,” he said. “Those were my influences.”

Shields’ agent encouraged him to start a foundation, then helped him form Will to Succeed 16 years ago. The foundation assists 40 agencies in the Kansas City area that serve abused and neglected women and children, literacy and scholarships initiatives, and improving creativity.

Shields said he appreciates the American Citizen award, but credits others for the honor.

“It’s not me,” he said. “It’s the people that helped me. It’s for everyone that’s influenced your life.”

Shields said being able to give and seeing what it does for a group is the most significant part of helping others.

“I’m just a vehicle,” he said. “I pull people together to accomplish something for the greater good.”

Leta Lorenzen, Olathe, group fitness director and kinesis coordinator at 68’s Inside Sports, said Shields remains good-natured in spite of managing a business and foundation, and raising

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three children.

“He’s involved in so many different things, and he gives his heart and soul to everything from family to business to charity,” she said. “He’s very down-to-earth.”