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Chicago law firm pitches in to help children with special needs

By John Flynn Rooney
Law Bulletin staff writer

More than two years ago, Swanson, Martin & Bell LLP decided to become involved in raising funds for a nonprofit group that provides equipment to special needs children from underprivileged families.

At a recent event, Thumbuddy Special presented its Generous Hearts Award to Timothy G. Nickels, Swanson, Martin & Bell's managing partner. This year's cocktail party fundraiser with a silent auction and raffle drew more than 100 people, including law firm employees and the firm's clients, including medical and insurance claims professionals.

"It was gratifying to both our employees and our clients to support such a great organization that does not regularly get that kind of outside attention," Nickels said. "We hope that this will lead to other people being interested in supporting the cause."

David J. Cahill, another Swanson, Martin & Bell partner, said he has been a donor to Thumbuddy Special for many years. Cahill's longtime friend, Mary Ellen Connelly, co-founded and serves as president of the group that provides wheelchairs, strollers, computers, adapted bikes and other equipment to children with disabilities.

About two years ago, the firm's officials planned an event for clients and decided to combine the outing with making a contribution to a worthy cause, Cahill said.

At the 2009 event, several thousand dollars were raised for Thumbuddy Special.

Two children who have benefited from Thumbuddy Special attended last month's event held at ZED451 on Chicago's Near North Side.

"Our clients really enjoyed it," Cahill said. "I think that it is quite poignant and touching when the people [who donate] see the children and their families."

Connelly, a physical therapist who works with children who have physical disabilities,



Swanson, Martin & Bell LLP managing partner Timothy G. Nickels (right) posed for a photo with Thumbuddy Special recipient Horacio, who presented Nickels with the award.

praised the firm for spearheading the recent event, which raised about \$3,600. Those funds will pay for the group's third annual "Moms Day Out" next month, she said.

"That money will pay for 10 [low-income] moms to go and be pampered for a day," Connelly said, adding that the women get money to spend on themselves and are treated to dinner and a limousine ride. "We're grateful for [the firm's] involvement and hope they can continue."

Connelly said, "Anytime we can spread our word to new people is a bonus to us."

The group operates with about a dozen volunteers, including other physical thera-

pists and special education teachers, while 95 percent of the proceeds raised go directly to children and families in need, Connelly said.

Those wishing to donate to Thumbuddy Special can send contributions to P.O. Box 145, Downers Grove, IL 60515.

The group's name emanated from its origin in 1992 when children who benefited from donations sent thank you notes, Connelly said. The children, who could not write, would press their thumbs on an ink pad and then put their thumbprints on paper. The thank you notes would state that the donors were "Thumbuddy Special," she said.