

# FAIRFIELD COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## profits & passions

## Patrick Sciaratta

### A lot to juggle

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Dressed smartly in black, looking a decade younger than his 56 years and still fresh at 3 p.m. after a cross-town meeting with corporate executives, Patrick Sciaratta could be mistaken for a top-tier honcho in any number of endeavors. It's the juggling pins tucked beneath his arm that give him away as someone walking the corridors of power with a different mission, which, without hyperbole, is peace on Earth.

Not that Sciaratta juggles, except metaphorically, as executive director of Friendship Ambassador Foundation Inc., a position he has held for 15 years. The juggling is from an earlier career that has never really gone away, as evidenced by the on-call athleticism he exhibits with the pins, not just keeping them afloat, but making it look easy.

The Friendship Ambassador Foundation has a staff of five in Greenwich and a second office in Budapest, Hungary. It was founded officially 35 years ago by Fulbright scholar Harry Morgan and travel entrepreneur Cappy Devlin after running informally as the Ambassadors for Friendship for 15 years before that under funding from Lila and DeWitt Wallace, founders of Reader's Digest.

In those earliest years, a 22-year-old man named Kofi Annan came from Ghana to tour America in a station wagon in the name of international comity, with the Wallaces footing the bill. Annan would, of course, go on to become secretary general of the United Nations, serving from 1997 to 2007.

### Bridging the gap

The Morgan-Devlin spark in 1973 to bring the Ambassadors of Friendship to a new level (and give it its current name, Friendship Ambassadors Foundation) came as a result of the cold war. With seemingly every third item in America now made in China, it can feel like eons ago that a U.S. ping-pong team, pressed into service by President Richard Nixon, ventured to the Great Wall, rocking the world. Within 10 years, the foundation had arranged for the first official performance exchange with the Chinese, then viewed across the American political spectrum as a billion Godless commies and little more.

"The idea was to bridge the gap between the U.S. and the old U.S.S.R. and what was then called Red China after the ping-pong diplomacy," Sciaratta said. "Since that time, we've created the opportunity for hundreds of thousands of people in preformed groups – choirs, dance companies, diplomatic exchanges – to give performances, or have joint concert opportunities, or work on proj-

ects like U.N. initiatives, or initiate sister-city projects. I'm very proud of who we are and what we've been able to accomplish." The foundation's mission: "Promote peace through cultural exchange." More than 1,000 people per year participate. Diplomacy, grassroots or otherwise, costs money and an array of corporations and organizations – including the Junior League of White Plains, the Wall, Ceiling and Carpenters Association, Hitachi, Rotary International, the Red Cross and the Lions Clubs International – have helped. But, said Sciaratta, "Organizations ask us to do their projects and they pay for it. Most of the money – about 90 percent – is provided by the institutions and organizations that use us."

Sciaratta reckons the foundation has spread good will through exchanges between more than half the countries in the world.

The nonprofit foundation's fundraising is mostly directed to its Youth Symphony for United Nations, made up of students from Bronxville, N.Y., to Westport. Whatever today's youth are supposed to be up to in our collective psyche – computer games, slacking off – these musicians have a different agenda. They flew to New Orleans for a post-Katrina concert and left behind 70 donated instruments for kids whose oboes and violins were gone with the wind. Mayor Ray Nagin honored them. So did the U.S. Senate. The 12- to 16-year-olds also raised \$10,000 for Balkan orphans in a single Columbia University concert. (Take that, Nintendo!)

### No slowing down

Aug. 11-14, the foundation will co-host the fifth annual Youth Assembly at the United Nations. The event, preceded by a four-day leadership seminar, will bring hundreds of youth leaders from around the world to the U.N. "We run it," Sciaratta said. After last year's U.N. confab, King Abdullah was so impressed with the report he received from Jordan's youth delegation that he personally invited Sciaratta to Petra, Jordan, this June for a conference of Nobel laureates. Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel also invited Sciaratta to the same meeting. Sciaratta will be there. And as long as we're name-dropping, Sciaratta's efforts have a big fan in Kathy Ireland, a beauty of no small renown whose generosity to the foundation transcends skin deep.

It's a busy world, but Sciaratta evinces ease and confidence unaffected by, for example, trips to underdeveloped regions where the foundation helps communities trying to outlive conflict. Perhaps juggling is the key to his optimism. He's really, really good, quickly demonstrating mastery of both tennis balls and pins.

He is co-founder (along with Joanna Sherman) and current board chairman of the Bond Street Theatre, billed as "a physical theater



**Occupation:** Foundation chief  
**Passion:** A world undivided  
**Works in:** Greenwich  
**Lives in:** Mamaroneck, N.Y.

company with a social consciousness, a global view and a sense of humor." It's a

life path that led him to the arcane arts of mime, unicycling, stilt-walking and juggling: all of which can be enjoyed al fresco, independent of language barriers. The troupe's early shows in 1976 lasted only as long as its van's battery could run the stage equipment. Bond Street is a foundation partner, notably in helping 9/11

families not only here, but in all the countries touched by the horror: 89 by

Sciaratta's tally.

While juggling, Sciaratta says he is not as good as he used to be, hobbled a bit by a pair of hip operations. Frankly, you'd never know it and if told, keep it quiet. With peace and global understanding on his docket, this is no time for him to slow down.

**Successful business people have many dimensions, they even manage to have some fun.**