

THE TRANSFORMERS

Each year since 1994, Chicago has honored a handful of people whose actions have changed life in the region for the better. This year we honor a champion of the disabled, an African American publisher, a world-renowned chef, a mother who turned loss into hope, a lifesaving animal lover, a kid helping other kids, and a longtime advocate of tolerance and diversity. At a January luncheon at the Four Seasons, Chicago will celebrate the achievements of these seven remarkable individuals and reward them each with a \$1,000 donation from the Chicago Tribune Foundation for the charity of their choice.

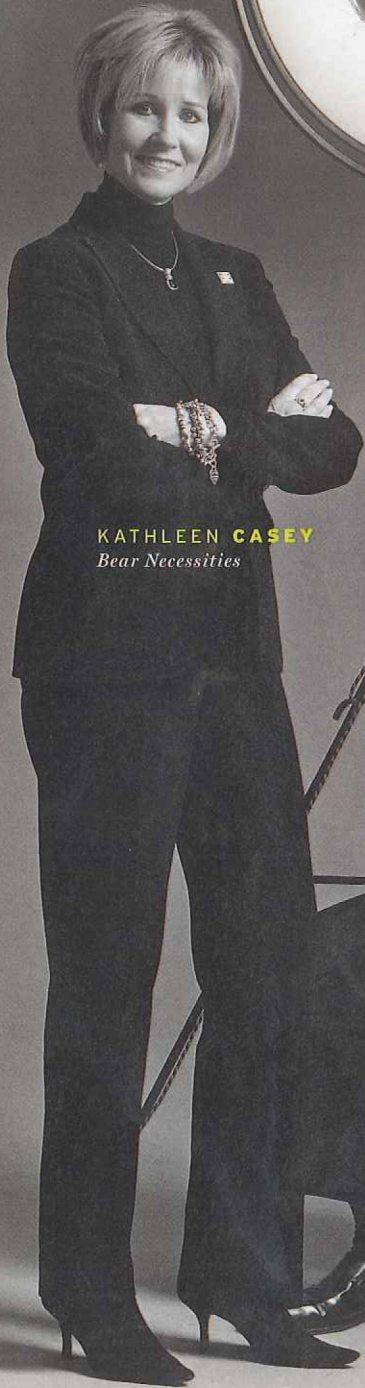


CHARLIE TROTTER
Charlie Trotter's

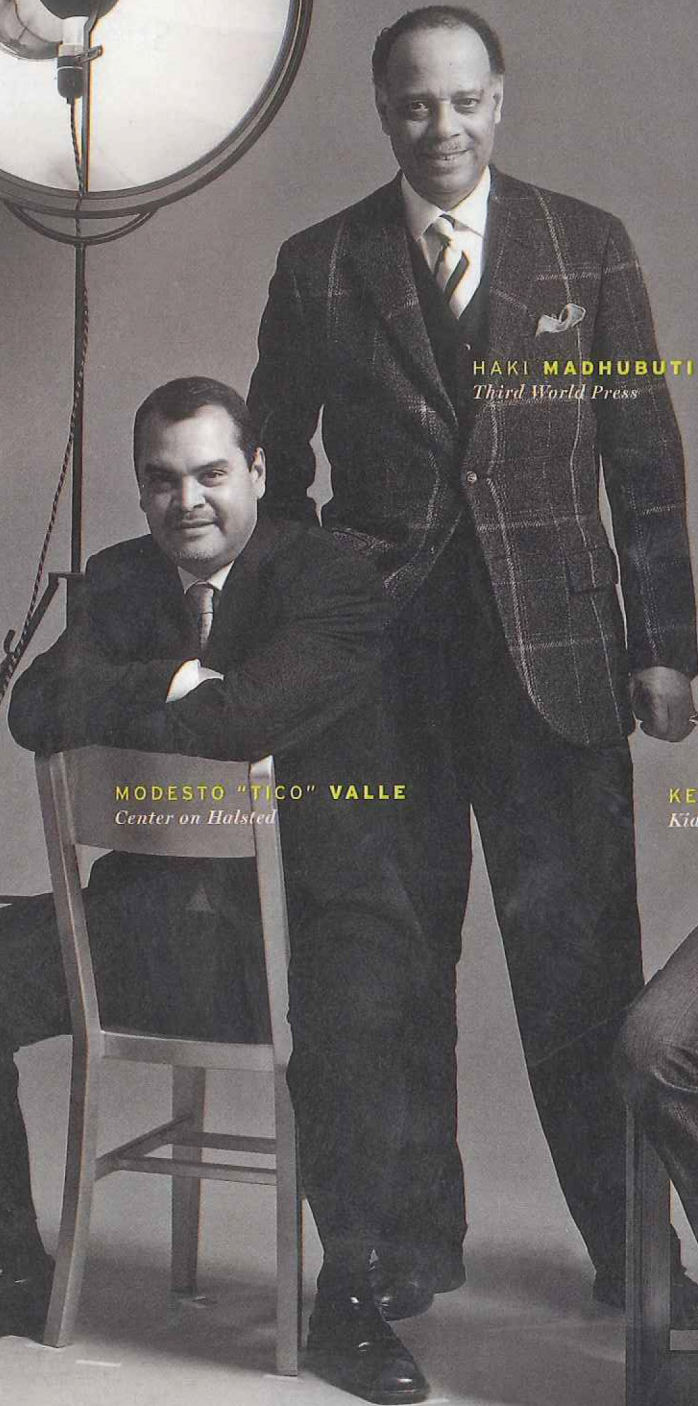
MARCA BRISTO
Access Living

PAULA FASSEAS
PAWS Chicago

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM MADAY

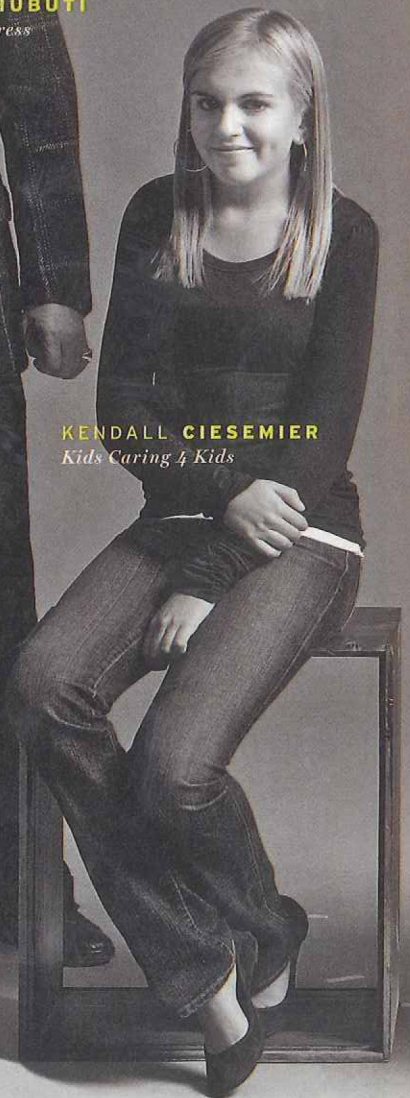


KATHLEEN CASEY
Bear Necessities



MODESTO "TICO" VALLE
Center on Halsted

HAKI MADHUBUTI
Third World Press



KENDALL CIESEMIER
Kids Caring 4 Kids

A PET'S BEST FRIEND

PAULA FASSEAS ✶ PAWS Chicago

IT'S LIKE A SCENE out of *Snow White*—if Snow White had an MBA. As Paula Fasseas prowls the new PAWS adoption center, downy hounds lick her fingertips and skinny kittens twine around her ankles. It almost seems as if they know that Fasseas, the founder and chair of Pets Are Worth Saving (PAWS), is the best friend Chicago's homeless animals have.

Fasseas, 52, got involved in local animal welfare in 1997, when her then-teenage daughter was volunteering at a local shelter. Both mother and daughter were shocked to learn the number of strays put to death in Chicago each year: 42,500 in 1997 alone. "Ninety to 95 percent of the animals that came in were being killed," Fasseas says of an early research trip to the city pound. "I had to do something."



Whereas some moms might have adopted a puppy and called it a day, Fasseas—who with her husband, Peter, also runs the Metropolitan Bank Group—embarked on a more ambitious plan: making Chicago a 100-percent no-kill city (that is, a city where no strays would be put to death). She began by taking strays out of the pound and showcasing them for adoption in high-traffic, family-friendly locales (called "Angels with Tails," these adoption events continue today). She complemented those efforts with the PAWS Chicago Cat Adoption Center, which opened on Clark Street in 1998.

"But the quickest way to the solution was not going to be adoption," acknowledges Fasseas. "It was going to be sterilization." In 2000, PAWS launched the Lurie Family Spay and Neuter Clinic in Little Village, where pet owners from low-income ZIP codes or on public assistance could have their animals fixed free or at a reduced rate. In 2006, the clinic spayed and neutered more than 12,000 pets.

Finally, this past September, PAWS opened its 13,000-square-foot, \$9-million no-kill Adoption and Humane Center at 1997 North Clybourn Avenue. The first state-of-the-art cage-free shelter in the Midwest—and one of only four in the country—houses about 70 dogs and 80 cats in airy, glass-walled suites. Amenities include a landscaped roof deck; a ventilation system that refreshes the shelter's air 15 times an hour; and a lavish waiting area for potential owners. Most dogs and cats end up spending only a few nights in the shelter, and even hard-to-adopt older animals tend to find

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homes within two weeks. PAWS expects to adopt out about 1,700 pets in 2007; in 2008, it hopes to place about 4,000 pets.

With help from PAWS, the percentage of strays euthanized in Chicago has decreased by nearly 54 percent between 1997 and 2006—and Fasseas says the city is on track to be completely no-kill in five years. That will make her job harder—"We'll be going downstate, and to Indiana and Wisconsin and Missouri" to retrieve adoptable pets, she says—but that's a change Fasseas, and the animals, can live with.

—JENNIFER WEHUNT ■