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Susan Finco is involved in a number of community organizations and recently turned an idea of hers into a project to collect socks and underwear for needy children. The Business News photo by J.A. Robb

The Undercover Challenge

Finco turned her idea into new project to help the needy

By Betty Wall

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People who make a difference

► Susan Finco, owner and president
Leonard & Finco Public Relations Inc.

Susan Finco had an idea mulling around in her head for several years. "I decided that I needed to do something about it," Finco said, "so I started talking to people in the community."

Finco is owner and president of Leonard & Finco Public Relations, a Green Bay public relations firm specializing in issues management, media and community relations, image campaigns, and crisis management.

The project that grew out of Finco's idea is called "A Pair and a Spare: Brown County's Undercover Challenge," coordinated through the Brown County Homeless and Housing Coalition. Held during a 2-week period in October, the

project involved 100 collection sites where people could donate new socks and underwear for needy children and adults.

"We collected more than 11,000 pairs of socks and underwear," Finco said. "Personally, this project has been incredibly satisfying. The need is out there, and it is one of those things that people don't think about. Socks and underwear are the most requested items at thrift stores. It was really something to have the idea and then to help shepherd this along. The Coalition really

helped pull it together for the community. Next year, it will be a month-long effort and it will be on-going."

She said that she got her whole company involved in the project, helping with the fund-raising and marketing. The Brown County Homeless and Housing Coalition handled the collection, sorting, and distribution to agencies.

Finco said the idea came to her after she talked with a principal at an at-risk school in Green Bay who said kids would come to school without socks, or they wouldn't have spare, dry socks and underwear after playing outside in the winter.

"I couldn't imagine kids coming to school

See Finco, PAGE 4

Finco/Effort collected socks, underwear for needy

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without socks. How sad for these kids, that always stuck with me."

Finco lends her expertise to several community organizations. Currently, she serves on the UWGB Board of Trustees, the board of directors for Bellis Health, and is involved with the 65 Roses Club. She recently finished work on a St. Norbert College task force for Music Theater. She is also active in the Green Bay Downtown Rotary Club, serving on committees for the district conference and the Free Enterprise Dinner.

Finco is a member of the board of directors for the Green Bay Packers and was chair of the community relations committee.

"Serving on the Packers board is interesting, exciting and challenging all at the same," she said. "The Packers are such a great community organization. As a board member, it is part of our responsibility to make sure they stay strong financially and that they are a part of the community," Finco said. "I am always astounded by the thousands of items that are donated to nonprofits every year for auctions and events and the number of speaking engagements that the team does."

For 65 Roses, Finco helps out with a yearly golf outing that raises money for the local Cystic Fibrosis Resource Center at St. Vincent and also for CF research at the University of Wisconsin. Money goes to help train physicians, nurses, and staff in the local area.

Finco is from the Milwaukee area and a graduate of UW-Milwaukee. Her mother was born in Italy and came to the United States at age 13. Her father was born here shortly after his parents came from Italy. She said her parents instilled a sense of helping others at an early age.

"I have been volunteering for as long as I can remember. It was part of how I grew up. I am a first generation American. My parents grew up during the Depression era, and I always remember them talking about the help they received when times

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— Susan Finco, owner and president
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were really tough. I think it was just part of who they were. I learned that you help other people because it is the right thing to do. It so profoundly impacted them that it was passed on to us when we were young."

Finco said she encourages her employees to become involved in the community. "We have a philosophy at Leonard & Finco that community involvement is important. It is important for the company, but also, it is good for your employees. I think they feel better about themselves when they volunteer," she said. "They are encouraged to get involved; they are allowed to go on worktime. We don't set a time limit on it. They can balance that out to get their work done. As a result, everybody in our company is involved in some kind of volunteer work."

"Being involved with nonprofits is rewarding on so many different levels," said Finco. "Whether it's personal or from a business perspective, I believe it's important to be a part of something bigger than yourself. I have been incredibly blessed and fortunate in my life. It wouldn't occur to me to not give back to the community."