

Why I Give

Philanthropist Steve Goldman's home, decorated with Chihuly glass sculptures, serves as headquarters for his campaign to expand and enhance Central Florida's cultural offerings. The Young Composer's Challenge is one of Goldman's initiatives.



FOUR LOCAL PHILANTHROPISTS TALK ABOUT THE CAUSES CLOSEST TO THEIR HEARTS.

by **Michael McLeod**

photographs by
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RENAISSANCE MAN

Steve Goldman is a right-brain, left-brain soul, a gifted individual who clearly has it going on in both hemispheres.

While his left brain was earning a degree in physics, developing the world's first intelligent computer disc controller and serving as interim CEO for the Orlando Science Center, his right brain was composing orchestral music, amassing a collection of art-glass sculptures, developing an interest in haute cuisine, and becoming a board member and key supporter of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra.

Somewhere along the way, Goldman, 60, firmly established himself as the Renaissance man of Central Florida philanthropists. It's a course he set out on 11 years ago, when he sold off his multimillion dollar, Maitland-based computer business, Distributed Processing Technology, and began devoting himself full time to the task of reinvigorating Central Florida's cultural landscape.

"When I owned my company, we had trouble recruiting computer techs to move here because there was so little to do, culturally, in this town," Goldman says. "We used to call Orlando 'the Silicone Swamp.' I wanted to do something to change that."

First, he needed a suitable headquarters. The same year he retired, workers put the final touches on a sleek, 10,000-square-foot, modern minimalist home of Goldman's own design. It's an imposing glass palace, surrounded by cedar trees in an exclusive Winter Park neighborhood



The Heart of Florida United Way's Chef's Gala.

GALAS, BEHIND THE SCENES A SUCCESSFUL EVENT TAKES MONTHS OF PLANNING AND SOME GOOD LUCK.

Good food. Good entertainment. Good location. But most of all: a good cause.

Such are the ingredients of galas: the formal, or at least semi-formal affairs that offer a critical lifeline for the organizations they benefit – particularly during hard times. Dozens of annual galas are held by worthy Central Florida nonprofits, in venues ranging from hotel ballrooms and elegant restaurants to fancy tents and even a shopping mall concourse.

Some of her peers wrestle with the wisdom of holding high-toned events in a down economy, acknowledges Cheryl Collins, vice president of the Orlando Health Foundation. She oversees the annual One Night gala to benefit Orlando Regional Medical Center's Level One Trauma Center.

"When times are tough, charities are needed more than ever," Collins says. "Stop your event and people won't know you're there. Your best way to stay alive and relevant is through an event. I always caution people: 'You may need to scale back, but don't disappear.'"

Many organizers have taken that advice. While elaborate by definition, galas these days usually cost less in proportion to the funds they raise. Before the downturn in 2008, the generally accepted fundraising standard for galas was no more than 40 cents spent for every dollar raised. Now, Collins says, the per-dollar standard is closer to 25 cents.

To put that in real-world terms, galas that raise \$100,000 should cost no more than \$25,000.

Some galas cost a lot less than that. This year's Chef's Gala, which cost Heart of Florida United Way about \$6,000, raised more than \$180,000, reports Robert H. Brown, the organization's president and chief executive officer. In other words, each dollar raised cost less than 4 cents – a practically unheard-of ratio.

"All the gods have to smile upon you," says Brown. "In our case it's Disney. They give away the store." The store, in this case, refers to the food, the wine, the venue and virtually everything else. "We even get our printing donated," Brown says.

Chef's Gala has more going for it than a generous benefactor. The 2012 edition will be its 20th, and history counts for a lot. "You have to build an event over several years," says Brown. "In most cases it takes more work, and nets less, the first time out."

But even the 20th time out, throwing a gala isn't easy. Planning began in September for next May's Chef's Gala, says Michele Plant, Heart of Florida United Way's marketing director, whose five-page checklist already includes nearly 200 to-do line items.

Still, Plant admits, not even seasoned planning pros can anticipate everything. Last year, a burst water pipe flooded the venue at Epcot's World Showcase the night before the big event. "There was water everywhere," recalls Plant. "You could row a boat." There were still puddles on the floor the next morning. But with the help of powerful fans, the place was dry

on the far shore of Lake Maitland, dominated in front by a castle-like, two-story milk-glass facade.

The heart of the home, which Goldman shares with his wife, Melanie, is a circular, open-air office. Unless it's being visited by the family cat – a plump Maine coon named Bunky who carries himself with an aura of privilege and luxury – the office has a lean, sparsely furnished, understated feel. There's just a chair, a computer terminal and a desk made of glass.

But the view is spectacular.

From his desk, Goldman looks out past a free-standing, winding staircase to a luminous semicircle of two-story, floor-to-ceiling glass walls. Straight ahead and to the left is a spectacular, treehouse view of the surrounding cedars. A suspended array of shimmering Chihuly "Persians" decorates the left wall, which is the inside of the translucent, milk-glass tower.

The organic, petal-like glass sculptures give the appearance of floating along the wall like a vertical array of multicolored lily pads. It took Goldman's right brain a year of discussions with representatives of the decorative sculpted-glass firm to come up with the hypnotic design. Credit his left brain for devising the system of moveable armatures that made it possible.

Goldman considers the house a work of art, a suitable site for his daily meetings with a core of cultural crusaders: educators, artists, fundraisers and fellow philanthropists. His reach into the community is as expansive as his view. In addition to his work with the orchestra and science center, he has served as a trustee of United Arts and is on a key advisory council for the University of Central Florida's College of Arts and Sciences.

But Goldman devotes most of his time to a classical music initiative called the Young Composer's Challenge and an animated, humorous, science-oriented series of educational videos he's developing in conjunction with UCF educators.

Or, as he wryly puts it: “I spend 60 percent of my time on one, and the other 60 percent of my time on the other. I keep trying to expand my own bandwidth.”

The inspiration for the Young Composer’s Challenge goes back to Goldman’s teenage years, when he was a student at Winter Park High School and played clarinet in the marching band.

“One of my hobbies was composing music for a full orchestra,” he says. “I was pretty much of a lone ranger. I’d spend a long time writing it. Then I’d take it to rehearsal and the band would play it. When it was over, I’d always think: ‘Six months work, and that’s it!’”

Eventually, as a student at the University of Florida, Goldman became involved in a considerably more sociable musical environment: He joined a rock band. They called themselves Live Oak. On occasion they shared the stage with another Gainesville band, Mudcrutch, whose frontman, Tom Petty, would soon go on, like Goldman, to bigger things.

Goldman never forgot either the pleasure or the loneliness of composing for orchestras. So he devised a nationwide competition for young, would-be composers, who are invited to create a five-minute piece for either a standard orchestra or an ensemble.

Competitors submit computer-generated recordings of their compositions. A panel of judges – Goldman is one of them – selects six winners, three in each category. Winners receive cash prizes and are brought to Orlando to hear their compositions played for an audience by the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra.

The event, dubbed a “Composium” by its creator, is held every November at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre and is free to the public. There’s no other event like it in the world. It’s hard to image anyone with even a fleeting interest in classical music who wouldn’t find it fascinating.

Here’s how it works. Members of the

by the time guests made their red-carpet entrances that evening.

Organizers all have stories of such near-disasters. Nicole Stewart, vice chair for this year’s Florida Hospital Golden Gala and chair for next year’s version, recalls an event from a few years back in which organizers were told just four hours beforehand that floral centerpieces for 250 tables wouldn’t be delivered.

Although voices were raised, nobody panicked. Phone calls were made, strings were pulled, and four hours later the 250 tables each were graced with simple rose arrangements. Gala planning “is like wedding planning,” Stewart says. “You know something is going to happen – it’s Murphy’s Law.”

Murphy paid a visit to last year’s One Night gala, held at The Mall at Millenia. The Moroccan-themed event called for hundreds of decorative palm fronds, to be delivered a few hours beforehand. The fronds turned out taller than expected – tall enough to be blown over by the mall’s air-conditioning vents. “We had to trim their heights, add weight to their bases, reposition the tables – at the last moment with the mall open,” Collins says.

All was well by the time guests arrived, but it was months of planning, not last-minute scrambling, that made the evening a success. Rather than traditional entertainment, One Night always offers a single compelling story of someone who benefited from ORMC’s Level One Trauma Center.

“The story is the program,” says Collins, and it’s told during a half-hour presentation combining on-stage speeches and video segments. The segments require at least nine months of production and post-production work.

Entertainment is more traditional at Florida Hospital’s Golden Gala, which features celebrity performers. This year’s headliner, Bill Cosby, was signed in 2010. “You start on the next gala while you’re planning the current one,” says Stewart.

Chef’s Gala eschews both stories and performers – “It’s about great food, real good wine and fun people,” Brown says. But with nearly two-dozen participating restaurants, it still requires at least eight months of planning.

Despite their diverse formats, Chef’s Gala, Golden Gala and One Night do share one element that’s common to many if not most galas: a silent auction. Live auctions may be livelier, but “you need big-ticket items to generate the energy needed for people to bid,” says Brooke Zapata, Florida Hospital Foundation’s staff leader for the Golden Gala.

Silent auctions may include some big-ticket items, but they also offer more modest donated products and services. It’s simple but effective: You put out attractive baskets of desirable items, each with a sign-up sheet requiring new signers to outbid previous ones. “We’ve never had an empty sheet,” Zapata notes.

But while raising funds is critical to any gala, it’s more than a fundraiser, says Brown. “It’s also a friend-raising event. People are invited that we otherwise don’t have contact with. They’re exposed to the organization in a variety of ways that evening, and we develop friendships and donors from that.” –Harry Wessel



GALAS GALORE

A month-by-month sampling of Central Florida's top galas, and the causes they benefit. Dates below are for 2012 events.

MARCH

HEART BALL

March 10

American Heart Association

AN EVENING AT THE PALACE

March 10

United Cerebral Palsy of Central Florida

BLACK TIE & TENNIS GALA

March 24

Orlando Magic Youth Foundation

APRIL

BOY SCOUT GOLDEN EAGLE DINNER

April 12

Central Florida Council-Boy Scouts of America

CATTLE BARONS' BALL

April 12

American Cancer Society

DINNER OF TRIBUTE

April 25

Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida

DIAMOND GALA

April 28

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Northern & Central Florida

FIELD OF DREAMS GALA

April 28

Kids House of Seminole

MAY

CELEBRATE THE CHILDREN

May 4

Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida

WISHMAKER'S BALL

May 5

Make-A-Wish Foundation of Central & Northern Florida

orchestra arrive at the venue without having heard any of the compositions. They're given sheet music for a piece and play it once as a rehearsal. The young composer sits on stage, watches his or her brainchild come to life, then has the opportunity, in a conversation with the conductor, Christopher Wilkens, to critique the orchestra's rehearsal before it's played again as a performance.

During one particularly meticulous critique, a droll Wilkens turned to the audience and said: "This is the problem working with composers who are still alive."

The man behind this, for all his inventiveness and high-level cultural hobnobbing, is an easygoing, low-key individual who projects the air of a somewhat rumpled free spirit: On first impression, you'd likely guess geek squad/rocker before ever imagining entrepreneur/philanthropist.

But cultural insiders in Orlando know better. Many of them might not have survived the past few lean years without him.

With an absolutely straight face, David Shillhammer, executive director of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra, says: "Sometimes I think we've all been put here on this earth to serve Steve Goldman."

Apparently, Steve Goldman sees it the other way around.

THE MYSTERIOUS DR. NELSON YING

There's a certain air of mystery around Nelson Ying. He likes it that way. "If I tell you too much about my personal life, I might have trouble," he says. "I don't want pretty girls trying to kiss me at the airport."

Ying knows full well that there's not much chance he'll ever be mobbed by pretty girls – at least, not unless they're both pretty and extremely intelligent.

Take Morgan Cable, who has studied the possibility of extraterrestrial life at

One of the more colorful galas of the year is the Neanderthal Ball at the Orlando Science Center, which features elegant hors d'oeuvres and a caveman couture dress code. The annual event, presented by the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, hauled in about \$100,000 and is the center's biggest fundraiser.



NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, climbed to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and earned a Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry from Caltech. Though it's unlikely she'll be stalking him at airports, she'll always have a soft spot in her heart for Ying.

Cable, a Titusville native, was one of the first winners of the Dr. Nelson Ying Science Competition, an event held in conjunction with the Orlando Science Center during which high-school students present ideas for science projects whose results might benefit humanity. The winner is awarded a cash prize of \$5,000. His or her science teacher and school principal each receive \$1,000.

Cable's winning entry was about the possibility of life on Mars. "That project got me hooked on space science, and I haven't looked back," she says. "I still have the award from Dr. Ying. His generosity and enthusiasm really stuck with me."

Ying, an entrepreneur with a degree in nuclear physics from Adelphi University, is chairman of the China Group, which owns the Chinese Pavilion at Epcot. That mysterious air about him goes way back: In 1992, he created something



By rewarding today's bright young minds for inventive science projects, Dr. Nelson Ying says that he's trying, in his own small way, to "prevent or delay the onset of the next Dark Ages?"

of a stir when he announced that he had discovered a method for cold fusion.

Other scientists were leery of the statement. (Cold fusion is the holy grail of cheap-energy panaceas, but claims of breakthroughs rank in credibility alongside Sasquatch sightings to most observers in the scientific community). Ying eventually abandoned the project.

He says he came up with the idea for the science competition "because there are too many competing role models for young

PHOTOS: (BOTTOM) SHARON GONZALEZ; (TOP) COURTESY DR. NELSON YING





The timeline charting development of the John and Rita Lowndes Shakespeare Center doesn't mention the summer-stock productions that charmed Rita Lowndes as a child. Perhaps it should.

people in this country. They want to be rock stars, movie stars, investment bankers. Any student who is interested in science is called a nerd. We want to create a competing role model to change that.”

Ying has a more long-reaching, philosophical motivation as well. “In my small way, I am trying to prevent or delay the onset of the next Dark Ages,” he says. “Science and ethics are the foundation of humanity.”

So when the Orange County Public School system dropped its science fair in 2003, Ying came to the rescue, donating the money

to keep the competition going. Today, the science fair is called the Nelson Ying Orange County Science Exposition. He has done the same for other school systems with shrinking budgets.

“I sponsor science fairs in the northernmost counties of New York and the southernmost counties of Florida,” he says. Then he adds, slyly: “Of course, I don't tell people I don't do any of the counties in between.”

THE FIRST LADY OF THEATER

First came the ferryboat ride across the Straits of Mackinac. Then came long, lazy mornings picking blueberries, raspberries and wild thimbleberries in her grandparents' garden and the woods beyond, and sunny afternoons spent scrambling along the rocky shores of Lake Superior.

Rita Lowndes has wonderful memories of summer vacation



days spent as a child in the tiny town of Laurium, on Michigan's scenic Upper Peninsula. She's grateful for all of them. It's the memories she has of evenings, watching shows presented by the town's summer-stock theater, that the rest of us should be grateful for.

Those nights marked the beginning of a lifelong intoxication with the stage, one that would help to inspire her, years later, to become one of Orlando's most important champions of the dramatic arts.

Lowndes is one of Orlando's classiest and most enthusiastic advocates for numerous worthy causes: Planned Parenthood, United Arts, the Center for Wom-

en's Philanthropy, the Coalition for the Homeless, Trinity Preparatory School, the University of Central Florida and the Winter Park Library.

"Rita is the person no one can say 'no to,'" says the city's undisputed philanthropic matriarch, Harriett Lake. "She is the most dynamic person I know. She could be running a Fortune 500 company."

Instead, Lowndes has her causes. The best known among them came her way in the late '80s, when her husband, prominent Orlando attorney John Lowndes, arrived home from his law office one day and handed her a bundle of papers.

"It was a folder full of information about something called the Orlando Shakespeare Festival," she remembers. "He was wondering if we should get involved."

They did. At least, Rita did.

For the next two decades she became a key volunteer for the festival, whose main goal was to bring professional productions of Shakespeare's plays and other classics to local audiences. Most of those plays were staged in the outdoor amphitheater at Lake Eola, where performances could be enchanting, but only if the weather was right, the pigeons behaved themselves and the noise of downtown traffic allowed.

The festival needed a proper theater. It got one in the fall of 2000, after John and Rita donated \$750,000 as seed money toward a \$3.5 million effort to turn the old Orlando Science Center into a permanent home for the festival.

Two like-minded couples, Ken and Trisha Margeson and Sig and Marilyn Goldman, added \$500,000 and \$300,000, respectively. (The Goldmans are Steve Goldman's parents.)

Today, the John and Rita Lowndes Shakespeare Center's four-theater complex in what is now Loch Haven Cultural Park brings nine fully staged productions, two workshops, 13 readings and a total of 326 performances per season to Orlando.

John and Rita are a constant presence

ONE NIGHT

May 6

Orlando Regional Medical Center's Level 1 Trauma Center

FURBALL

May 12

SPCA of Central Florida

CHEF'S GALA

May 19

Heart of Florida United Way

JUNE

BLACK & WHITE GALA

June 2

Give Kids the World

SEPTEMBER

PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ

(TBA)

Lighthouse Central Florida

OCTOBER

HEADDRESS BALL

Oct. 6

Hope & Help Center of Central Florida

EVENING OF VALOR

Oct. 21

Jewish Family Services

LIVE LAUGH LOVE

(TBA)

Hospice of the Comforter

NOVEMBER

NEANDERTHAL BALL

Nov. 3

Orlando Science Center

GOLDEN GALA

Nov. 18

Florida Hospital

STARLIGHT BALL

(TBA)

Catholic Charities of Central Florida

at the center, attending shows, hosting receptions for visiting artists and sitting in on planning sessions for new productions – including a recent meeting with technicians who proudly displayed a pneumatic device they invented so that an actress in a recent production of the dark comedy, *God of Carnage*, could appear to throw up.

Ah, the theater. It may sound more gross than amusing, but somehow, in the context of the play, it came off as the latter – though Rita remarked, after seeing the show a few days later: “We might need a splash guard for the people in the front row.”

She relishes the broad range of productions at the center, from the classics to the works of local playwrights such as *The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge*.

“I think one of the things I like most is watching children when the schools bring them in for a show,” says Rita. “Just seeing hundreds of kids delighted by a show, watching them line up and jostle each other to get autographs from the actors.”

The Lowndeses are avid travelers, and recently made a successful bid during a silent auction at the Shakespeare Center’s annual gala for a nine-day trip to three of Vietnam’s lush tourist destinations: Con Dao, Nha Trang and Ninh Van Bay.

It’s doubtful the trip will rival the world tour they took to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. That junket jetted them to Lima and Machu Picchu, Peru; Easter Island; Samoa; the Great Barrier Reef; Papua, New Guinea; Angkor Wat, Cambodia; Agra, India; Dubai, United Arab Emirates; the Serengeti Plain, Tanzania; Marrakech, Morocco and London, England.

They took a more sober journey to scatter Rita’s parents’ ashes after they died within three months of each other. Her mother had specified several locations throughout the Upper Peninsula, home to so many important memories for them. Not to mention the rest of us.

GLOBAL HEALING

It would be easy to mistake Tony Nicholson for just another big-money sports fan. After all, he is friends with Orlando Magic owner Rich DeVos. His name was even briefly shopped around as a potential buyer when DeVos was looking to sell the team.

He recently helped to orchestrate an Orlando reunion and exhibition game consisting of former Magic players, and not too long ago he could be spotted squiring Dwight Howard around at a University of Central Florida football game.

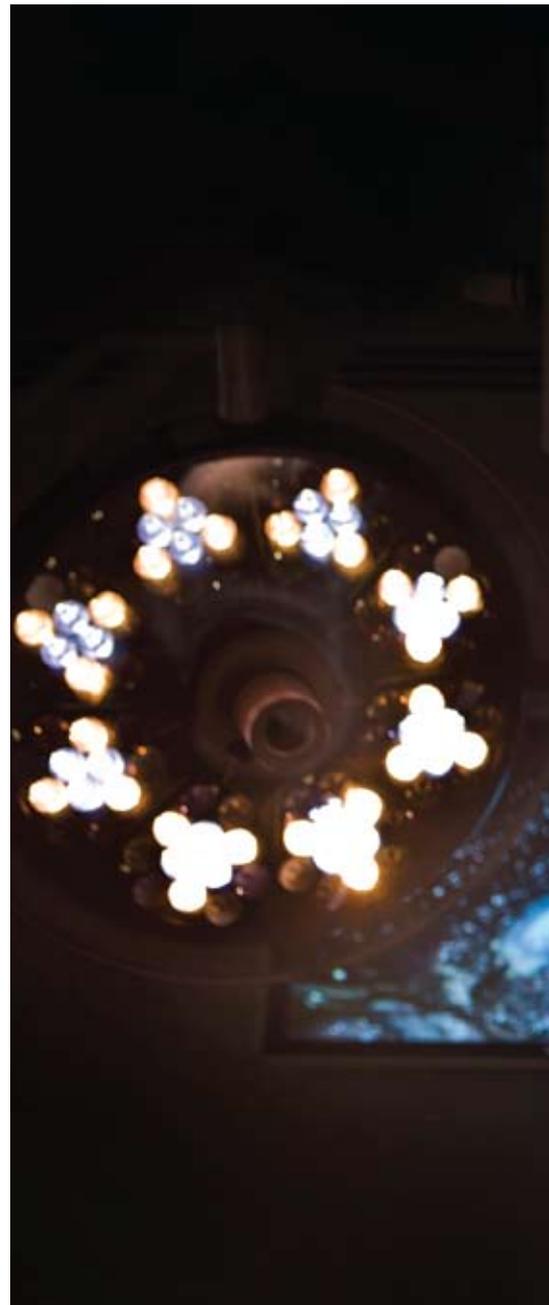
But the truth is that Nicholson, a semi-retired Orlando entrepreneur, developer and real-estate financier, is less interested in superstar athletes than he is in world-class surgeons. What engages him most of all is the lofty possibility that he can help these gifted healers bring peace to a troubled world.

And to think it all started with a fish tank.

In the mid-’90s, Nicholson agreed when fundraisers from Florida Hospital asked him to pay for installation of a tank, which was meant to soothe the nerves of patients and visitors in a waiting area. The satisfaction he derived from giving the gift piqued his interest. So did his discussions with his longtime friend, 97-year-old retired cardiologist Norman Wall, one of the more philosophical members of the local health-care community.

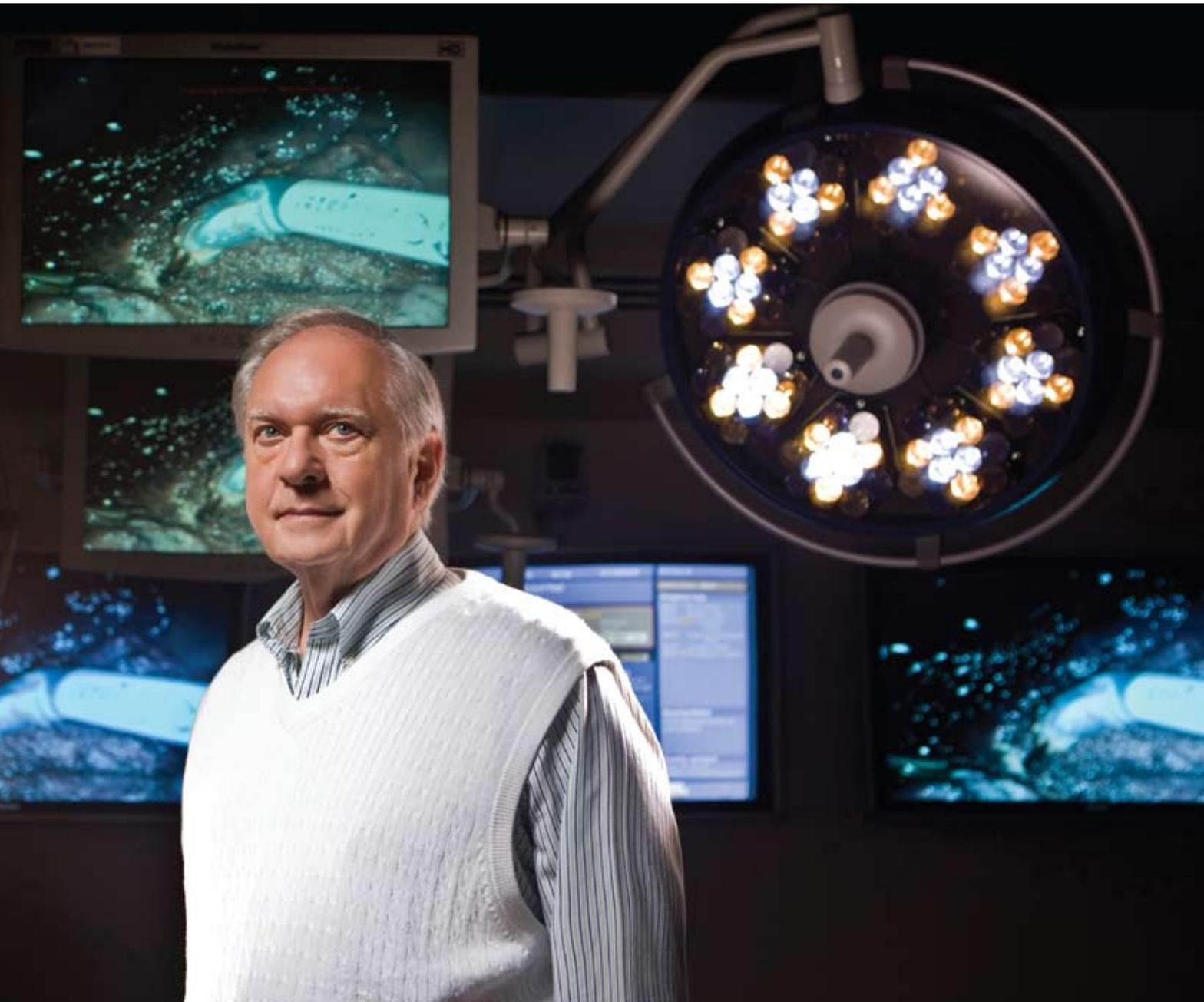
When University of Central Florida President John Hitt began campaigning for a medical school at UCF, Nicholson did some reading about the possibilities of Internet training for doctors, and proposed that such a center be established at UCF. Hitt didn’t like the idea. Florida Hospital officials did.

Five years ago, Nicholson and his wife, Sonja, pledged \$5 million toward the expansion of the Surgical Learning Institute, an advanced training center



for surgeons at Florida Hospital’s Celebration Health campus. Now named the Nicholson Center for Surgical Advancement, the center recently opened a \$35 million education facility.

Its resources include an array of robotic-assisted surgery suites. Operations that take place there can be broadcast to fledgling surgeons all over the world. Doctors also can be trained through state-of-the-art simulators at the center, learning surgical techniques much as commercial airline pilots learn to fly. More than 20,000 medical professionals a year, from all over the globe, are expected



to study at the facility, either by traveling to Orlando or participating remotely.

Nicholson's interest in robotic-assisted surgery has made him something of a globe-trotter himself. He traveled to Moscow, where he watched his friend, Dr. Vipul Patel of Florida Hospital's Global Robotics Institute, perform Russia's first robotically assisted prostatectomy. The procedure was broadcast live to 80 million viewers.

But it was his trip to Israel with a delegation of Orlando civic leaders and doctors that most inspired him.

The group visited that country's largest hospital, the Chaim Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer, near Tel Aviv. The hospital offers medical care where needed, regardless of a patient's faith. While there, he heard the story of a Palestinian woman who had just delivered a baby. When asked what she wanted her child to grow up to be, she replied: "A martyr."

Tony Nicholson's \$5 million pledge was critical to the development of the high-tech robotic surgery operating suites at Florida Hospital's Nicholson Center for Surgical Advancement.

Nicholson was horrified. The impact of that story, and what he saw of the Israeli hospital and learned from its doctors, strengthened his resolve: Now that Orlando has its robotic surgery center, he wants to work toward establishing a similar, satellite facility at Chaim Sheba.

"The success of what we have in Orlando, and what might be possible elsewhere, is important to my world," Nicholson says. "If we can bring peace through medicine, if we can have Arab doctors and Israeli doctors training at the same facility, maybe then people will see the light." ●