

Hometown Heroes

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Jenny Jones

At a time when money seems to be in short supply, Jenny Jones is giving \$1 million away — for the second time.

The former talk show host says success isn't about money, but about individuals doing what they're meant to do. "To me, success means being fulfilled, but that doesn't mean financially," Jones says. "You can be struggling financially but still feel fulfilled because you are doing something good — something that matters."

Fulfilling her passions has meant different things to Jones. She has enjoyed a variety of careers, such as being a fashion model, comedian, musician, singer, songwriter and author. But she's most widely known because of the success of her daytime talk show that ran from 1991 to 2003, the *Jenny Jones Show*. The notoriety she earned has enabled her to successfully promote women's health causes, and now through Jenny's Heroes, Jones continues to fulfill her dreams by funding others' efforts to make a difference in their communities.

Jenny's Heroes provides monetary grants up to \$25,000 to fund projects on a long-term basis. Though Jones could give the money to any number of charities, she says the ability to empower people to help others has been more rewarding and more effective. It's also become a full-time job.

"By partnering with all these heroes, my grants are reaching more people than I ever could have on my own. This is a way for me to give back to everyday people in a personal way," Jones says. "My relationship with the heroes, as we exchange e-mails and photos, allows me to share in their joy and see how much good is being done in their community. I could have written a big check to a charity, but this is so much more rewarding; there is just no comparison."

Her grass-roots approach to philanthropy has had an unexpected ripple effect. "By publicizing their stories, other people have come forward with more donations and support," Jones says. "My personal approach is motivating others to lend a hand to their communities."

Examples of this ripple effect are abundant:

- A California Highway Patrol officer used the grant she received from Jenny's Heroes to provide a new security fence at her local battered-women's shelter. Soon after, the shelter saw an increased number of volunteers and in-kind donations, including a truck.
- When a children's librarian in North Carolina purchased books and new shelving for the library, the facility saw a significant increase in book donations from local children. Also, an author donated a box of books.
- Students' grades improved when a teacher in Nevada bought soccer uniforms with the grant money. (Team members are required to earn good marks if they want to play.)
- More than \$5,000 in additional donations was given to a senior center when a maintenance man in Kansas used his grant to install a home theater at the facility.
- When a coal miner in Kentucky purchased life-saving equipment for his volunteer fire fighters, they were finally able to get financing for a new truck.

Jones founded Jenny's Heroes and gave away her first \$1 million in 2008. The foundation is accepting grant applications for 2009, and Jones plans to give away another \$1 million this year. Jones personally reviews the applications and says, "Primarily, I look at how many people will be helped and the potential longevity of the project." For example, a police officer in Pennsylvania installed a computer lab in a small-town library where most of the 3,500 residents have no access to the Internet. The computers offer a long-term benefit and have helped hundreds of people, she says. "He tells me that whenever he goes by the library there are people waiting to go online. People are studying, looking for jobs and creating résumés. Look how many people could benefit from this one gift.

"Knowing I am making a difference in ways that will benefit communities for years to come is fulfillment and success beyond my wildest dreams," Jones says.

To learn more, visit www.jennysheroes.com.