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Blank's a champion for children

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Maria Saporta](#) Contributing Writer

If it has to do with children in Georgia, chances are that Stephanie Blank is somehow involved.

Blank, a philanthropist who is married to **The Home Depot Inc.** co-founder Arthur Blank, will be at the podium June 1 to announce a first in Georgia.

The state is joining up with Quality Care for Children (QCC) to offer the first-ever child-care referral system with a toll-free number.

The service will include about 3,000 child-care learning centers, 250 group day-care homes and 5,300 family day-care homes throughout Georgia in one big database.

QCC also will announce that it has received a \$770,000 grant from the **Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation** to help family child-care providers receive state credentials. As of July 1, the state is implementing a legal credentialing requirement for new family child-care providers.

The Whitehead grant also will help families who are looking for work by paying for up to four months of child care for families.

This will give families throughout the state one place to find licensed child care.

"Over 60 percent of families in Georgia need some form of child care," said Blank, who is serving as a spokeswoman for the QCC's new service in public service announcements. "As the economic crisis continues to worsen, that number will continue to go up."

Blank, as a trustee of the **The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation**, has been involved in providing more than \$1 million in grants to the QCC over the last five years.

One of the foundation's three strategic areas is "Better Beginnings," which invests in early childhood learning and helps improve the lives of children across Georgia.

Blank's involvement extends far beyond the QCC. She is the first woman to chair the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Foundation, which has undergone a massive fundraising effort.

She also serves on the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta Inc.'s Early Learning Commission that is being co-chaired by Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta President Dennis Lockhart and Spelman College President Beverly Tatum.

She, along with U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson, also received the first ever "Big Voice" award from Voices for Georgia's Children in 2007. And she championed the effort to create Atlanta's children's museum — Imagine It! The Children's Museum of Atlanta.

So when did Blank become so interested in children's causes?

"Part of it was becoming a mother and realizing what an overwhelming sensation that is," Blank said. "I had all the resources in the world — a very involved family, a supportive mother and supportive husband.

"I had everything you could ask for, and it still was overwhelming."

She also suffered from a mild bout of postpartum depression, which made becoming a mother even more challenging.

That led her to think about the difficulties young single mothers must face trying to raise children with limited resources and without a strong support system.

When talking to Blank about children, be ready to set aside some time.

She is well-versed and engaged in all facets involving children.

"Stephanie is playing a leadership role on early childhood and children's issues," said Penny McPhee, president of the Blank Foundation. "It's something she's passionate about."

Blank would love for the Early Learning Commission to successfully implement consistent standards throughout the state for child care.



Byron E. Small

Stephanie Blank: On June 1, she will announce that the state is joining up with Quality Care for Children to offer the first-ever child-care referral system with a toll-free number.

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Learning is especially critical for children between the ages of birth to 3 years, but Georgia tends to rank low nationally when it comes to child-care standards. And the problem doesn't get much better for children older than 3.

"We don't have enough slots for pre-K right now, and we don't have any pre-K for 3-year-olds," Blank said. "If the state doesn't have enough spaces, how do we fill in the gap?"

Meanwhile, Blank is helping serve the needs of sick or injured children through her involvement with the Children's Healthcare Foundation. The foundation recently exceeded a \$264 million campaign goal by raising \$294 million.

But the fundraising still isn't complete.

A separate \$43 million campaign for the **Hughes-Spalding Children's Hospital** near **Grady Hospital** is still \$7.5 million short. But Children's Healthcare already has broken ground on the project, and it is scheduled to be completed in October.

Blank devotes so much of her time to children's causes because she feels almost all the other issues she and the foundation care about — the environment and the arts — can be traced back to education and care for the young.

She boils down the issue to this question: How do we as a society recognize that every parent can't or won't spend the appropriate quality time with their child, and do we as a society take the responsibility to make sure someone is caring for those children?

That's why she is comforted to see that the state is partnering with QCC to provide referrals for quality child care.

"I think the state's decision to implement the toll-free number is a huge step in recognizing they need to take a lead in helping parents," Blank said.

But she would like to see the state do more, such as the state and governor establishing a "children's cabinet" as other states have done.

As Blank said: "That's something I would eventually love to see in Georgia."

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