

An emotional paycheck

Retired executive finds fulfillment in charity work

By JENNIFER LARSEN DUDA
STAFF WRITER

It's been a chaotic few weeks for Michele Thompson.

She's helped organize a major fundraiser for a large charity and seen her oldest son, Michael, married. And with the holidays around the corner, it's time to take a break.

But the retired health care administrator isn't accepting the common image of a retiree. The Burr Ridge resident is discovering a whole other work world — one that doesn't pay in dollars, but in good feelings.

The New York native is one of a number of women on the United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Chicago Women's Board. The group organizes the annual Gambol Gala, a cabaret-casino style event, which is one of the longest fundraisers. Items for auction, the 55-year-old said.

Despite the long hours, Thompson said the good UCP does more than makes up for the hard work required for the event.

"I have always been involved off and on with other boards, but knowing what the fundraising is for (with UCP) ... makes this all worthwhile," she said.

Thompson is quick to add that she's not a one-woman team. The Gambol event wouldn't be possible without the hard work and donations of others, including Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicago, its Executive Vice President Jan Fields and UCP Women's Board President Deborah Lahey.

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"There are so many other people involved," Thompson said.

The charitable work helps fill the time Thompson once spent working as administrator of Provident Hospital of Cook County.

When her youngest son, Jeremy, was having problems with diabetes, Thompson and for him. Her son and daughter, Kafi, don't mind her being at home, Thompson said. They're involved in their own activities. But surprisingly, the mother of three doesn't have much free time.

"I totally find myself involved in so many other things," she said, adding that her son's health has improved. "I do strength training and I dance. I tap dance. I had some lessons when I was young and then took it up again at 24."

Thompson's energy and drive is one of the things her friend Liz Thompson (no relation) said she admires most. Friends for more than a decade, the two met when their husbands worked together at McDonald's Corp.

"A lot of people probably



Michele Thompson left a successful career in health administration to spend more time at home, but her retirement hasn't been quiet. She's taken on volunteer position for two non-profit groups, including the Cerebral Palsy of Greater Chicago, where she serves on the women's board. (Photo for The Doings by Herb Shenkin)

IL - W650
WEEKLY NEWSPAPER
THE DOINGS - BURR RIDGE
EDITION
Burr Ridge, IL
Circ - 3,573
Thu
DECEMBER 6, 2007

don't know how successful a career she had at the hospital," Liz Thompson said. "The stereotype (of retirement) is you stay home and bake cookies and it's just not like that. Michele is so motivated and she's such a driven person that

she's really taken on a whole new job now."

Thompson doesn't rule out someday re-entering the workforce but, at least for now, she's focused on taking care of her children and throwing herself into the work she does for UCP

and other groups.

"In 10 years I don't know what I'll be doing," she said. "I could be saddled with grandkids and taking care of them. And if that doesn't happen, I'm sure I'll find many other things