

Rochester

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MAGAZINE

GOOD DEEDS

They're improving Rochester and the world – see how you can, too

HOLIDAY DISHES,
FROM TOP CHEFS

BEST AND WORST
GIFTS EVER

Inside: Holiday Gift Guide



Thomas Warfield's guiding principle, "adventure without fear," had served him well as he traveled the world as a dancer. However, on one trip to China, he grew uneasy when the train dropped him off in a barren outpost, deserted but for a small girl drawing pictures in the earth.

"When she saw me, she started shaking like a leaf," said Warfield. "She had never seen a black person." But when he sat down, picked up a stick and began drawing his own pictures, she edged closer, curious to see his artwork.

"That [experience] changed my life. I felt more profoundly connected to that girl than to many people in my life at the time. I understood that we're all one people."

That one moment led him to create PeaceArt International, Inc., a nonprofit organization that uses the arts "to dismantle racial, cultural, religious, gender, sexual orientation, economic and physical barriers,... build community and foster greater human understanding." In May, PeaceArt International received the United Nations Association's 2007 Media/Arts Award.

A love of the arts and concern for social justice is in Warfield's DNA. His father, Robert, was a music conductor with the 98th Division Army Band; his mother, Vernice, worked as a Methodist minister and civil rights activist. His uncle, baritone William Warfield, broke the race barrier on a national stage to sing in American classics *Porgy and Bess* and *Showboat*.

In October, Warfield joined Arun Gandhi for RIT's Campus Week of Dialogue. On Dec. 1 at the Auditorium Center, Warfield will hold his annual World AIDS Day Benefit Concert in Rochester to raise funds for and awareness about orphans around the world afflicted with and affected by HIV/AIDS. This year, proceeds will help Haitian orphans. It's the seventh fundraiser here, but Warfield has been organizing such concerts in different parts of the world since 1990.

Meanwhile, Warfield is at work on his biggest peace project. Over a decade ago, he invited a few friends to send him small poems for a "Global Poem of Praise and Peace." The idea mushroomed, and he began receiving poems from around the world: "soldiers in Nicaragua, a farmer in India, Mother Teresa, Leonard Bernstein, and Francois Mitterrand," among many others, he said. He's compiling them for publication to show that we're not so different from each other in longing for a peaceful, creative world.

- Nancy O'Donnell



Thomas Warfield

President/artistic director,
PeaceArt International, Inc.

"Philanthropy is all about expressing who you are...What you give grows and blossoms. It's not just about money. It's about time and energy and prayer...Generous gifts tell more about what your soul is about than your finances."