



## **Engaging the Public to Honor A Woman Engaging the Community**

By Ingrid Velmonte

What started as a personal gift from mother to son has grown into an international organization. A simple "pillowcase project" has attracted volunteers and coordinators, who endeavor to provide children in hospitals with comfort and joy, and the woman who started this grassroots effort is being honored by one of the world's largest beauty care companies.

On December 10, 2008 at the CNN Inspire Summit, Cindy Kerr of Wayne, PA became the National Honoree of L'Oreal Paris' [Women of Worth](#) program. She is the founder of [ConKerr Cancer – A Case for Smiles](#), an organization that delivers pillowcases to brighten hospital rooms and make children with life changing illnesses smile. In three years, 42,000 sick children in U.S. hospitals received special pillowcases from the organization, which has 56 chapters serving children in 66 hospitals and pediatric hospices in the U.S., Canada and South Africa.

It all started six years ago when Ryan Kerr, who passed away this year, was diagnosed with a rare childhood cancer, and his mom chose to add something positive to a life changing situation. She began sewing pillowcases for his hospital room, and then started making them for other children at his hospital. Today, with the help of the Internet, Cindy Kerr's organization is able to collect and distribute thousands of pillowcases.

"I started ConKerr Cancer out of my love for my son and I am so inspired by other women who have taken life's challenges as motivation to benefit those around them," explained Kerr. While other organizations tackle diseases to find treatments and cures, Kerr concerns herself with helping the children and their families cope.

L'Oreal Paris launched Women of Worth three years ago, with the title coming from the company's iconic tagline, "Because I'm Worth It." The brand philosophy celebrates women who "possess self-confidence and are committed to distinguishing their own lives by making a difference in the lives of others." Karen Fondu, President of L'Oreal Paris, describes the grassroots program as "a living, growing community that would connect women of all ages who make a difference in their communities." To date, the company has honored 30 women around the country.

Each year the company invites a panel of noteworthy female judges to evaluate and select the activists whose achievements they wish to celebrate. The 2008 Women of Worth represent a variety of causes, including education, nutrition, children's advocacy, care for veterans, special needs and female empowerment. Each of the ten honorees receives \$5,000 from L'Oreal Paris for their organizations, plus a \$5,000 matching donation made in their name to the Ovarian Cancer Research Fund, L'Oréal Paris's charitable partner.

Going further, the company then invites the public to learn about these women's causes and participate in an online vote for the National Honoree. As this year's National Honoree, Kerr will receive an additional \$25,000 donation for her cherished organization. She says, "I am so honored to have been chosen by the public as deserving of the Women of Worth National Honoree award."