

FOUNDATION FOR METROWEST BREAKFAST

# Holliston couple honored

Also at event, Panera CEO describes how he made a difference 'in a real way'

**By Richard K. Lodge**  
Daily News Staff

NEWTON - When Ron Shaich, the founder, CEO and chairman of Panera Bread, opened the first "Panera Cares" cafe in St. Louis three years ago, with a plan to let customers decide what they wanted to pay, people thought he was crazy.

The menu featured suggested donations for each item and a donation box replaced the cash register. Shaich believed people in a community who could afford to pay more would do that, supporting those who couldn't afford to pay full price - or who would pay

nothing at all. His goal was simple: Make sure people had enough to eat, whether they could afford it or not.

Three years later, with Panera Cares in St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago, Portland, Ore., and Boston, the experiment has been a success, Shaich told several hundred people attending the Community Leadership Breakfast of the Foundation for MetroWest Friday.

The Panera Cares cafes pay their own way now, he said, adding, "Of those five cafes, the people of Boston are the most generous. We

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may not be able to drive, but we have heart."

During the breakfast at the Marriott, MetroWest philanthropists Pat and Jim Poitras of Holliston were honored for their long-time support of Crossroads Foundation (now known as Foundation for MetroWest), as well as many other local nonprofit organizations.

The couple has influenced the town through their leadership in conserving the environment and enhancing local facilities, the foundation noted in announcing that they were to be honored.

They donated the 44 acres known now as the

Poitras Memorial Land, made a gift to protect wetlands in town and backed Mission Possible Holliston with funds that led to a new playground.

They have served on municipal boards such as the Board of Health, Town Forest Committee, the Celebrate Holliston Committee and the Foundation for MetroWest.

In his keynote speech, Shaich, who lives in Brookline and oversees a company with 1,700 bakery/cafes and 80,000 employees, spoke about how he has turned part of the company's focus to giving back to the communities where they're based.

He established Panera Cares under a non-profit umbrella as one effort to fight hunger.

For years, Panera had donated bread and bagels to shelters and pantries. But "it went out the back door of our cafes and it just felt disconnected," Shaich said. So he started wondering: "How do we make a difference in a real way?"

He knew with such a large company involved in feeding people for profit, "Panera's nation-spanning scale provided a powerful opportunity to apply our skills" to begin to solve the problem of hunger in America.

In a sign of his personal commitment to the cause, last month Shaich joined 26 members of Congress in the "SNAP challenge," to live for one week on \$4.50 per day, the average of a person living on food stamps.

He said he wasn't trying to trivialize the challenge



people face when they don't have enough money for food, but to help raise awareness of the problem of food insecurity.

"One in four children are hungry in the U.S.," he said. "This is not a problem external to us. It's right here in MetroWest. It's right here in our communities."

He opened the Panera Cares cafes as a way toward "making a difference in communities where we operate in new ways."

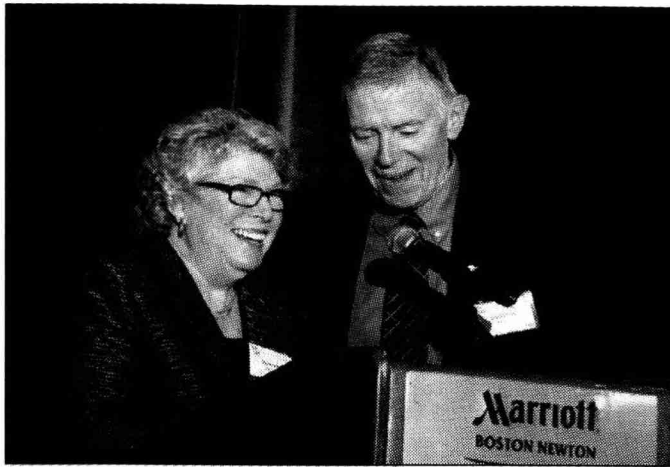
Shaich challenged the businessmen and women in the room to make a difference through philanthropy.

"We have to ask ourselves, what kind of society do we want?"

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**Pat and Jim Poitras of Holliston were honored Friday morning at the Foundation for MetroWest Community Leadership Breakfast held at the Newton Marriott. Here pictured with Jim Hickey, left, of the Marlborough Savings Bank. WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTO / ART ILLMAN**



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