

# CLEAN SWEEP

*Deirdre Imus and healthy kids*

IT WOULDN'T BE DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE DEIRDRE IMUS STROLLING along Fifth Avenue, popping into any tony boutique, and being fawned over by salesclerks. As the wife of media personality Don Imus, this Westport resident could have easily taken her place in that exclusive club. But Deirdre Imus has more important things on her mind. As mother, wife, best-selling author, entrepreneur, national advocate for a green lifestyle, and committed cancer crusader, she packs more into one week than most people do in a decade.

Her work first began when she and her husband were asked to help raise money for kids with cancer. That evolved into the Imus Cattle Ranch for Kids with Cancer, a 4,000-acre working ranch in northern New Mexico. Open since 1998, the ranch provides an American-cowboy experience to kids suffering from cancer and blood diseases.

From this work, Deirdre, always an advocate for a healthy lifestyle, became more interested in the concept of how toxins in the environment impacted people's health. She learned more about issues like autism, Attention Deficit Disorder, learning disabilities, and cancers, and became concerned that chemicals used in schools, homes, hospitals, and other institutions were contributing to a rise in these ailments. Her "Greening the Cleaning" program became nationally recognized, along with her line of environmentally responsible cleaning products. And from the Environmental Center she established, she is now rolling out the concept of green to institutions around

BY LEE WOODRUFF

PHOTOGRAPH BY RANA FAURE



**A CLASS BY HERSELF**  
Deirdre Imus of Westport at the Environmental Center she founded at Hackensack University Medical Center.

the country, from schools and pediatricians' offices to homes and hospitals.

The Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology, at Hackensack University Medical Center, opened in 2001. A hospital with 9,000 employees, it became a nationally recognized model of how a completely green approach to operating and cleaning can be successfully incorporated into a healthcare facility.

When I got a chance to chat with Deirdre for our planned 30 minutes, we

were still gabbing over an hour later. Her excitement and enthusiasm about her mission—doing for others and teaching kids to live more healthfully—is simply infectious:

**Q** *Let's start at the beginning. You do so much, but were you first inspired to make an impact through meeting kids with cancer?*

**A** Even as a child I had a desire to make a difference. I was a candy striper and volunteered with kids with

muscular dystrophy. Our work with kids dates back to 1992 when Don and I first met with a group of children with cancer and we began to really understand the realities for these families. Cancer is the leading cause of death by disease for children.

We observed that when a family got to the hospital, there would often be no support system in place. I thought, If you were a single, working mom, how would you do this? I started asking questions and still haven't stopped.

**Q** *Was it your own healthy lifestyle that led you to begin learning about the link between our environment and disease?*

**A** I have been a lifelong vegetarian and have always been concerned about the level of chemicals and toxic substances in our world. The more research I did, the more I learned about the rise of childhood illnesses and cancers. I wanted to do something about it. We had always applied our healthy lifestyle to the kids at the ranch, and they were eager to learn more. This led me to believe we could roll this concept out to kids and parents on a larger scale.

**Q** *Tell me about the "Greening the Cleaning" (GTC) program and how it began.*

**A** I first focused on cleaning products and how to get the toxic chemicals out of the hospital and replace them with green materials. We wanted to change the way people perceived the "smell of clean." The products we developed passed every test and actually exceed the necessary standards.

The Environmental Center has now taken my "Greening the Cleaning" program to schools, health-care buildings, and workplaces; and we've developed a turn-key program for overall children's health, including meal plans and diet. All of the profits from our GTC product line go back to charity and to the Imus Ranch.

**Q** *So you already had your hands full with the ranch when you went on to help found the Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology. How did that evolve?*



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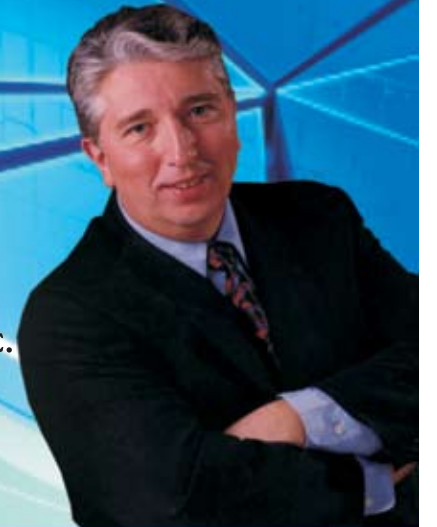
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**A** Anyone who spends time in a hospital understands that the whole hospital environment can make people sicker—the cleaning materials, food, the sick buildings, infectious disease, and bacteria. Most hospital buildings are not a place of wellness. I believe that the environment in a hospital should heal—just as effectively as healthcare workers heal.

I was determined to provide a place of learning and performance focused on kids and their environmental well-being. We are certain that one day we can identify and eradicate the major environmental risks our children are exposed to. We opened our doors in 2001 at Hackensack University Hospital and today, this is the first environmentally responsible and sustainable healthcare facility of its kind.

**Q** *You hear so much about "green" today. Everybody seems to be jumping on the bandwagon. What does it mean to you?*

**A** Green is simply choosing the least level of toxicity and/or non-toxicity in everything you do, whether it's cleaning products, food, cosmetics, clothing, or decorating your home.

**Q** *Deep down inside, what motivates you to keep giving? Did it start with your own son, Wyatt?*

**A** My motivation is simple. Children are our most precious resources and their environment shouldn't harm them. They can't protect themselves, so it's up to us.

For more information on Deirdre Imus and healthy living, visit [dienviro.com](http://dienviro.com). ■



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