

DON'T SIT ON YOUR PADDLE

Don Imus' Much Better Half Tells You All the Reasons Why You Should Buy

BY DEIRDRE IMUS PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS CATANIA

When children need a friend and advocate, Deirdre Imus is there. Her work on kids' behalf spans a broad range of issues, from children's environmental health to combating diseases that cut short or diminish their lives. Autism naturally falls within her universe of deep concerns, and the Bridgehampton auction to fight autism on June 7 is the kind of event that's dear to her heart.

For 25 years, my husband, Don Imus, has used his voice and his radio program to champion the cause of sick children, raising awareness and millions of dollars for children's charities and the Imus Ranch for Kids with Cancer in New Mexico.

Children are my passion, and I am fortunate to have a healthy child. Sadly, millions of parents wake up each morning confronting the challenges of caring for sick children who face a very uncertain future.

America's children should be the healthiest in the world, but they are among the sickest. We are the richest country in the world, yet the health of our children is deteriorating at an astonishing rate. The statistics on our children's health are shocking. One of the saddest "data sets" clusters around neurodevelopmental disorders: Autism, dyslexia, mental retardation, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) affect 5 to 10 percent of the children in the United States.

There is simply no way to overstate the heartache autism causes families. It is the fastest-growing developmental disability today—more common than diabetes, AIDS, and all cancers combined. By any standards it has taken on epidemic dimensions. Just 20 years ago the disorder was considered rare, affecting about 1 or 2 children in 10,000. Physicians could practice medicine for decades and never see an autistic child. In February 2007 the Centers for Disease Control issued a report announcing that autism now affects one in 150 children—one in 150!

A heated debate now rages about the possible connection of mercury-containing children's vaccines and autism. Many

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Deirdre Imus loves children, period. Her pediatric oncology research center works closely with the Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. Here, with children of staffers, she does one of her favorite things: hanging with kids.

in the mainstream medical community don't want to talk about this subject. They fear any question about vaccines will result in parents deciding not to vaccinate their children. But we can't bury our heads in the sand and wish the autism epidemic away. Last June, a high incidence of autism and other learning disorders among children born to teachers working at one New Jersey school was reported in the press. The Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology at Hackensack University Medical Center formed a task force to investigate these reports.

The failure to treat the autism epidemic as a national health emergency has been baffling. We hope to move into Phase 2 of this investigation, and that the study will provide some answers to the families affected by autism. We also hope to raise the funds to continue other important independent research projects that are desperately needed but not currently funded.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "Our lives begin to end when we become silent about the things that matter."

If our *children* don't matter enough for us to speak out and act on their behalf (they can't do it for themselves)—then what *does* matter? If we are silent on vital issues affecting the well-being of our children—it is only to our great shame as a nation.

For more information on the **Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology**, visit dienviro.com.