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## Man & Woman of the Year

By GLORY WEISBERG

Cherry Hills Villagers John and Anna Sie are our *Villager Man and Woman of the Year for 2008*. They are the embodiment of the American dream, coming to our shores with little other than hope for a better life.

We are honoring them for their dedication to the new Linda Crnic Institute for Down Syndrome at the University of Colorado Denver Anschutz Medical Campus. On Sept. 22, the university formally announced the Sie's \$34 million donation to focus on research into the condition their granddaughter, Sophia Whitten has. The Sie's first \$1 million donation came in 2006 to lessen the ill effects of Down Syndrome which Chancellor Roy Wilson said has already started to bear fruit. They hope to improve the cognitive ability of those with the gene dysfunction responsible for the illness, caused by an extra chromosome that brings with it other medical problems as well. Sophia is one of the one in 733 babies born in the U.S. who have this syndrome each year, and she is among the 400,000 people living with it.

Funds from the Sie gift will grow into a \$150 million organization in the coming decade, underwriting the 160 staffers expected to work in the new institute. Researchers hope that some day Sophia and others like her will have meaningful jobs, marry and live independently.

The couple has already brought attention to wonderful Sophia whose personality lights up a room and the entire Ridgeline Club at the Pepsi Center when she is part of the Little Hearts Luncheon that benefits the Cardiac Care Center at The Children's Hospital.

At the time the \$34 million donation was announced, John Sie was quoted last fall saying that "Sophia has been such a blessing in our lives and has led us to meet brilliant and huge hearted scientists such as Linda Crnic, Leslie Leinwand, Larry



Gold and the wonderful new leaders at the University of Colorado and The Children's Hospital. It has given my wife, Anna and I a whole new purpose in life and Sophia's parents, Michelle and Tom Whitten, have been laser focused on understanding what we can do better for not just Sophia but for generations of people with Down Syndrome to come. We are grateful that the best place to effectuate real change and discovery happens to be in our own back yard."

Indeed, Sharon Downing at The Children's Hospital nominated the Sies for the Man and Woman of the Year honor, noting, "The Sies have long been involved in supporting community organizations, one of the most recent being the Rocky Mountain Down Syndrome Educa-

tional Fund to create the Crnic Institute. The Sies have also been more than generous in supporting the Little Hearts Luncheon. (They are loving, caring, generous people and are well deserving of your award."

Lyn Schaffer has long been the leader of the Little Hearts Luncheon and she too supports the Sie's nomination, noting that they have lived in the Denver area since the mid-1980s, raising their family and becoming "successful business people. The (number) of organizations they support is too long to list," she said noting that the eight-figure donation to Down Syndrome is most important.

Sophia's mother, Michelle Sie Whitten, is Sie Foundation executive director, explaining that they provide grants to charities making a difference, from arts and culture to ill or abused children. Whitten initiated the Down Syndrome Educational Symposium Series that brings experts to Colorado several times a year. The foundation has helped underwrite 13 scientific research grants aiming to eradicate that third 21st chromosome.

John Sie is founder and former chairman of Starz Entertainment Group, founded in 1991, which is now owned by Liberty Media and the parent of 13 premium movie networks that also includes Encore. In 2003 Sie was inducted into the Cable Television Hall of Fame. A native of China, John Sie came to the U.S. when he was 14, initially staying at a Catholic orphanage until graduating from high school in 1953. He holds several graduate degrees and joined RCA Defense Electronics Division and co-founded a subsidiary of Raytheon, then joined Jerrold Electronics, part of General Instrument. He joined Showtime Entertainment in 1977. Some consider Sie the "father of digital television," as a recent bio on him said.

Anna Sie hails from Italy, growing up in New Jersey. As a child she didn't speak a word of English but had to care for her father and two brothers while her mother, sister and brothers waited in Italy until Anna could send for them. Anna endowed a chair in Italian language and culture at the University of Denver. Anna and John Sie have five children, Susan Sie, Dr. Debbie Sie, James Sie, Michelle Whitten and Allison Sie. Sophia is one of the Sie's four grandchildren.

The Sie Foundation supports the University of Denver Institute for Sino-American International Dialogue, the School of Science and Technology, the Denver Art Museum, the Starz Film Center and a host of other civic and social institutions.



Tom Whitten and daughter, Sophia



Anna and John Sie, Sophia Whitten, Lyn Schaffer; Patrick, Michelle and John Whitten