

Thompson

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had been touched by the condition. They weren't any more aware about the disease than the next couple.

The journey that would lead them to take up the cause of children with autism and their families started in 2002, shortly after Thompson's daughter **Emily** earned her master's degree in special education from **Chapman University**. She started working with children with autism and began to share conversations with her parents about the challenges families faced as they coped with the condition as caregivers.

Emily described the condition to her parents: Children with autism can have severely impaired social interaction; they may not respond when their name is called; their language is delayed if they speak at all. They might incessantly rock or spin or flap their hands. They can be extremely sensitive to sensory input like light and sound, and in the most extreme cases can't make eye contact, don't hug other people, or smile. They might never say, "I love you."

Thompson was amid a 17-year run at Newport Beach-based Pimco at the time—and only peripherally aware of the condition. It was years before data indicating sharp increases in autism cases was broadly publicized. Society was just beginning to realize the affect the condition has on children and their families.

Hearing about what his daughter was learning, though, planted a seed that would later grow into one of his most passionate causes.

Surprise

Thompson soon began to hear more about autism. Many Pimco employees had young children, and it turned out that a number people he knew had been touched in some way by the condition.

"I was really surprised to learn just how many people were dealing with this devastating situation," he said in a recent interview. "Autism presents tremendous challenges. It is incredibly difficult, it is just heartbreaking. It's an ongoing, life-long situation that families must cope with forever."

Thompson said he can relate to some of what those parents and families feel: He has a nephew now in his early 30s who was born with Down syndrome, a genetic disorder that alters the course of a child's development.

"It was the first time anyone in our family had to deal with a significant disability of any kind," Thompson said, adding that the experience made him more receptive to children with special needs. "Children and their families live with these conditions their entire lives. Each phase of their development—childhood, adolescence, adulthood—represent significant challenges."

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** this year significantly revised the es-



Toy train: greets families at Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders in Santa Ana

timated prevalence of autism in the United States in its most recent findings to one in 68 children. The new estimate is roughly 30% higher than in 2012, when it was one in 88 children.

In 2002, when Thompson became more aware of the impact of autism, one in 153 children was diagnosed with the condition, according to figures at the time.

He wanted to help out, but he didn't know then what form that would take.

Thompson and his wife have long been philanthropic. Over the years, they had supported causes that included **Hoag Hospital**, the **Pacific Symphony**, **Lucile Packard Children's Hospital**, and **Children's Hospital of Orange County**.

He also supported his alma mater, the **University of Missouri**.

"Maybe by coincidence, maybe by fate, I learned that the university was doing some interesting research in the field of autism," he said. "A light bulb went off in my head—here was a great opportunity to put our resources to work to fight autism and other neurological disorders."

The Thompsons spent time talking with doctors, clinicians, and therapists involved with autism research. He said they were impressed with how much knowledge medical professionals had amassed but that there was still much to learn.

Thompson was in a position to potentially make a significant impact. He and Nancy decided that the best way to put their resources to work was to create a center that brought the clinicians, scientists and thera-

pists under the same roof.

The **Bill & Nancy Thompson Family Foundation** provided an endowment to the university. The **Thompson Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders** opened its doors on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia in 2005.

The couple's foundation is also based in Missouri, which is why it's not on this week's list of Orange County-based private foundations (see list, page 26).

Thompson, who retired from Pimco in 2009, now devotes much of his time to working with the foundation and what's now two centers. He and Nancy serve on the foundation's board and maintain an active role at the centers.

"What matters most is all the amazing progress the doctors and scientists have made in this fight ... and the wonderful work done to help families," he said.

Three Legs

The **Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders** in Santa Ana, which was founded last year, and the Missouri center each has three areas of primary focus, or as Thompson puts it, legs of the stool.

"The mission of both centers is to provide treatment, research, and education," he said. "We want to train students like my daughter. We are working with public schools specifically about how to work with children who have autism. We are making people aware of what autism is and how to support the children and families affected by it."

Thompson is quick to credit the centers'

work to the doctors, scientists, and clinicians who have made the fight against autism their life mission.

"These people are extraordinary," he said. "These are smart people, really talented, doing top-notch work. My job is to support them."

Thompson and Nancy, after observing the progress of the first center toward better understanding and treating autism, collaborated with the **University of California-Irvine**, **CHOC**, and **Chapman University** to create the second center. They invested \$7.8 million through their foundation to fund the Santa Ana facility, matching a \$7 million grant from the public **Children and Families Commission of Orange County**.

Journey Continues

The centers coordinate efforts, share best practices, and conduct joint training.

Both also are connected to the **Simon Foundation Autism Research Initiative**, **Autism Network International**, and **Autism Speaks** through the **Autism Treatment Network**.

Thompson said the top goal for the centers is to educate people and increase access to high-quality care.

"The professionals at the centers want to make a significant impact on the world of autism," he said. "(The centers') impact can be life changing. It alters entire families, makes life so much better. Nancy and I are blessed. It puts tears in our eyes when we meet these children. This is different than anything we have done before." ■

Buena Park

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mins and dietary supplements brand," according to market research firm **Euromonitor International Ltd.**

Nutriline has about 680 employees at its Buena Park campus, a 22-acre spread on Beach Boulevard about a mile and a half north of The Source, a retail and entertainment project currently undergoing construction.

The local campus also houses quality assurance labs and the Center for Optimal Health, the international headquarters of the Nutriline Health Institute education center, which opened in 2006.

The workforce is "part of our more than 900 scientists, engineers and technical professionals who work in 75 R&D and quality assurance labs worldwide," said Manager of Brand Ex-

perience **Johanna Westerhuis**.

The expansion plans here include a new granulation facility for tablet manufacturing, pilot laboratories, and a two-story office building. The construction component has been completed, but Nutriline said the plant is expected to take several months for product testing, and won't begin to churn out products for the market until next year.

The company is set to have a grand opening of the new additions to the campus in coming weeks.

Amway's investment into Nutriline in Orange County is part of its global expansion initiative worth more than \$330 million. The direct-sales company plans similar investments at four sites in the U.S.—which collectively are expected to cost about \$200 million—and one each in India, Vietnam and China.

The first of the projects was completed last year when Amway added a 120,000-square-



Rehnberg: son of the late founder heads supplements maker

foot plant at its headquarters in Michigan to be used for making powder products for its Nutriline line. The development cost about \$24 million and created about 50 jobs in the area.

Other ongoing constructions include a \$50 million project in Quincy, Wash., where

Amway is adding a plant for making botanical concentrates.

Amway spent \$100 million to build its first manufacturing plant in India; \$25 million in its second plant in Vietnam; and \$10 million in a research center in Wuxi, China. Each of the projects is expected to be completed next year.

Nutriline was founded in 1934 by **Carl Rehnberg**, who began his research in the late 1920s at a one-room lab on Balboa Island. That was after his 12-year stint in China as a Colgate salesperson, during which he found connections between people's health and nutrients. The business moved to Buena Park in 1946.

Jay Van Andel and **Rich DeVos**, who were top Nutriline products distributors at the time, founded Amway in 1959, and in 1972 acquired a controlling interest in the company. Amway purchased the remaining stake in Nutriline in 1994.

Amway, now a unit of holding company **Alticor Inc.**, is one of the largest private companies in the U.S., with about 21,000 workers. Nutriline currently is headed by **Sam Rehnberg**, son of the late founder. The younger Rehnberg also serves as president of the Nutriline Health Institute. ■