



# Fonda on Fonda

**Actor. Activist. Fitness guru. There isn't much Jane Fonda hasn't done. These days, she's focusing her time and energy on reducing adolescent pregnancies in Georgia**

**By Mary Welch**

Don't say that Jane Fonda can't joke about herself. When *Business to Business* magazine asked the film icon about her first philanthropic effort, she replied that it was helping people in the armed services. "It is ironic," she notes, "given people's false impression of me."

Fonda opened and funded the Washington, D.C.-based G.I. Office, run by highly decorated Green Beret Donald Duncan. "We had a bevy of lawyers who received complaints from soldiers in all branches of the service who were being mistreated and denied their rights," she recalls. "We would help them and often took what we learned to Congress for investigation."

Fonda, an award-winning actor, political activist and former fitness guru, has always worked for those less fortunate despite her glamorous Hollywood upbringing. But it was only when she moved to Atlanta and married Ted Turner that she focused on Georgia, a state she loves and calls her permanent home. It is for her lifetime body of philanthropic work, and particularly in establishing the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (G-CAPP), that Fonda has been recognized

as a distinguished humanitarian.

Fonda was born in New York City to Academy Award-winning actor Henry Fonda and Frances Seymour Brokaw, who committed suicide when Jane was 12. In fact, it was her father's films that inspired her – both as an actor and as a philanthropist and political activist.

"I grew up with my father's films in which he played characters like Tom Joad in *'Grapes of Wrath,'* *'Twelve Angry Men'* and *'Young Mr. Lincoln'* – these were men who stood for justice, fairness or, to put it colloquially, sticking up for the underdogs," she recalls. "I adored my father so these values became my values. When I became an activist, the thing I was able to do that other activists couldn't was give and raise money because of my fame. That's what I ended up doing in large part ... fundraising, because that was where I was needed."

Over the years, Fonda has embraced a number of causes, mostly involving empowering women and children. But it was only when she moved to Atlanta for her marriage to Turner that perhaps she found her real calling with G-CAPP. The concept

for G-CAPP began in 1994 when she attended the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, as the Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nation's Population Fund. At that time, Georgia led the nation with the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy, and Fonda believed that the way to address the issue was by expanding the use of contraception.

From the conference, though, she learned it was more complex. She realized that to adequately address issues of sexuality and childbearing it was necessary to go beyond the traditional health-centered agenda to a complex mixture of social, economic and gender dynamics. These dynamics are critical components of women's and girls' experiences that influence the onset of sexual activity, family size and the spacing of children. Adolescents' sexual and reproductive behavior cannot be explained and modified without understanding the familial and societal forces that shape this behavior. With this understanding, Fonda created G-CAPP.

## **Georgia on her mind**

Returning to Georgia, Fonda traveled

through the state, talking to frontline workers to learn about adolescent life. Her research confirmed what she had learned at the Cairo Conference: girls who grow up in poverty without hope of bettering their situation are likely to become teen mothers.

In the United States, 80 percent of mothers who begin their families as teenagers are living at or below the poverty line long before they became pregnant. Without early and ongoing interventions, their early parenthood virtually guarantees that they and their children will spend their lives in poverty.

While sex education, reproductive health and family planning services are critical, they are not enough to prevent adolescent pregnancy. Through G-CAPP, Fonda's goal is to address the social antecedents that lie beneath the problem behavior.

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ment and population," says Fonda. "I studied the population issue and soon learned that the most profound way to reduce the rate of very young people having babies is to educate and empower girls and give both boys and girls hope for their future."

"Hope is the best contraceptive," she says. "It became a very personal issue for me. Despite my privileged growing up, I never had anyone I could discuss issues of sexuality with and like many, if not most, girls, I was handicapped by distorted gender stereotypes, so this is very close to my heart."

Among G-CAPP's programs are Educare, an innovative early learning center for chil-



dren up to age five in Atlanta, and the Doula Project, which provides doulas, or woman from the community, to provide emotional and physical support to teens and their babies. A third program is Second Chance

of Georgia declined 30 percent, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Between 1991 and 2004, there were more than 249,000 teen births in the state, costing taxpayers some \$5.7 billion during that time period. The 30 percent decline in teen birth rates saved taxpayers \$227 million in 2004 alone.

"I pray that Georgia's decision-makers and business leaders take note of these numbers," Fonda said when the study was released. "Clearly, it makes good fiscal, not to mention moral, sense to throw everything we've got into preventing youngsters from getting pregnant and to motivate young mothers to avoid second pregnancies."

Although Fonda has taken up many well-publicized causes, she maintains that her approach toward philanthropy hasn't changed over the years. "Not really," she says. "I've never seen my philanthropy as 'charity'. I don't like that word. I try to use my philanthropy to empower ... not to provide Band-Aids and safety nets. People can get caught in safety nets. I prefer to create trampolines and ladders instead of nets."

She also takes that result-oriented approach in advising others who want to give or get involved. "Just consider what Jesus did in not giving people fish, but in teaching them how to fish," she says. "That's what empowerment means. Ask yourselves if your giving will accomplish that." **BTB**