



Acts of Care

IN OUR EIGHTH ANNUAL WEBMD HEALTH HEROES TRIBUTE, WE HONOR AMERICANS WHO ARE DOING EXTRAORDINARY THINGS FOR THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF THE NATION. BY SUSAN DAVIS

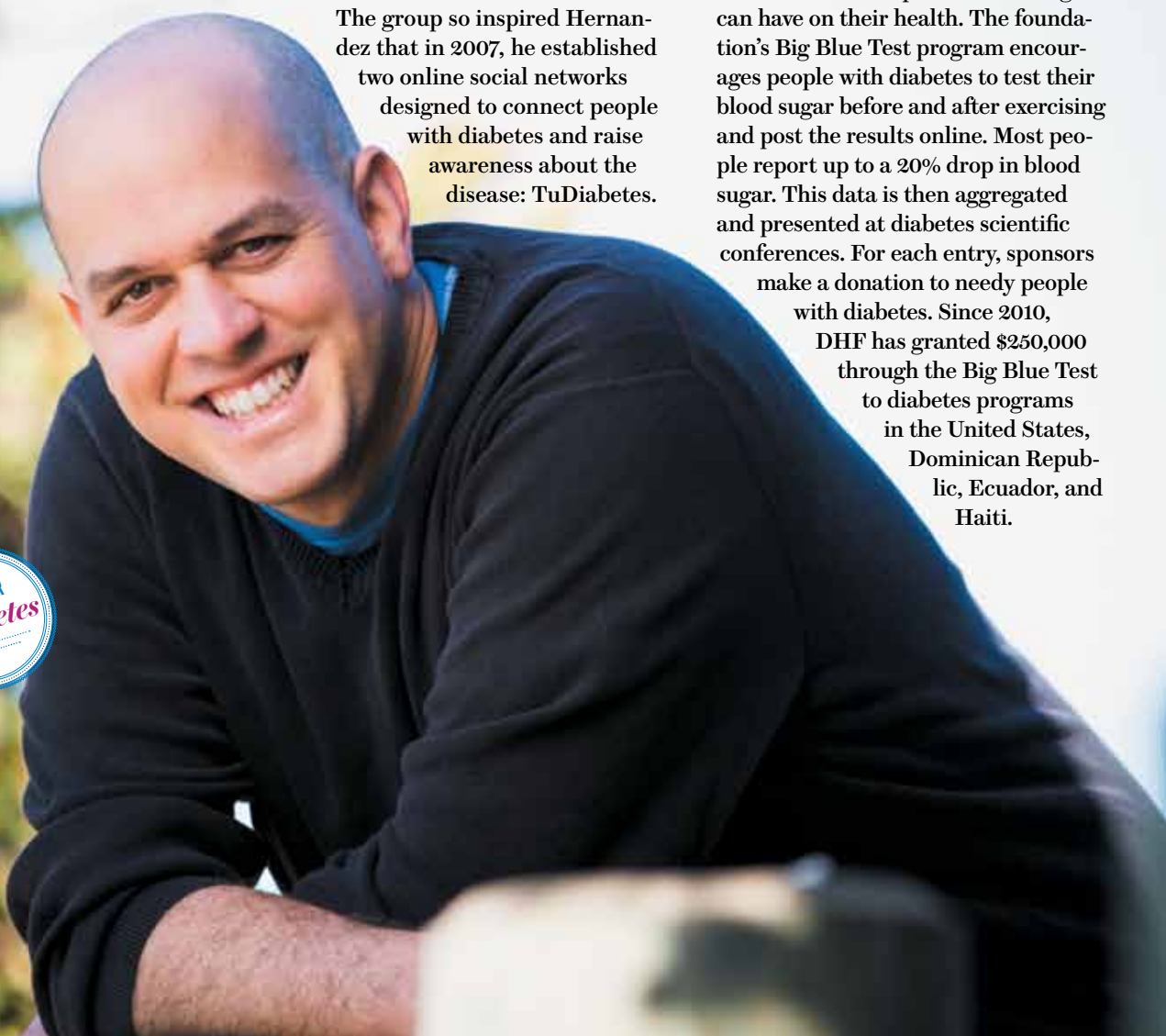
Tech Support

Joining a support group for people with diabetes was “transformative” for **Manny Hernandez**. “It was the first time I was able to meet, learn from, and share with other people like myself,” says Hernandez, 41, who has type 1 diabetes. “Within an hour, I learned more about diabetes management and pump use than in my first four years of living with the condition.”

The group so inspired Hernandez that in 2007, he established two online social networks designed to connect people with diabetes and raise awareness about the disease: TuDiabetes.

org (in English) and EsTuDiabetes.org (in Spanish), which together have more than 50,000 registered members. A year later, he and his wife founded the Diabetes Hands Foundation (DHF) in Berkeley, Calif., which aims to “bring together people touched by diabetes for positive change.”

Hernandez also wants people to understand the impact small changes can have on their health. The foundation’s Big Blue Test program encourages people with diabetes to test their blood sugar before and after exercising and post the results online. Most people report up to a 20% drop in blood sugar. This data is then aggregated and presented at diabetes scientific conferences. For each entry, sponsors make a donation to needy people with diabetes. Since 2010, DHF has granted \$250,000 through the Big Blue Test to diabetes programs in the United States, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Haiti.



Photograph by Robert Houser

School Work

Soon after enrolling her son, Jared, in kindergarten, **Tracy Milligan** of Jacksonville, Fla., got disturbing news. Under a new school district policy, her son, who has type 1 diabetes, couldn't attend his neighborhood school (which had no full-time nurse) unless a parent came to the school to give him insulin shots.

For two and a half years, Milligan, 41, drove from her job to give Jared the shots. Then after trying in vain to get the district to change its policy, Milligan decided to fight at the state level. Working with the American Diabetes Association (ADA), she contacted state legislators and motivated other parents to speak up.

In 2010, Florida legislators unanimously passed a law that prohibits school districts from assigning children to a particular school just because they have diabetes. "This essentially ended discrimination against children with diabetes," Milligan says.

Milligan is active in the ADA's national "Safe at School" campaign, which aims to ensure that all schoolchildren with diabetes get the medical care they need. She has traveled to Washington, D.C., to talk to legislators, assisted with webinars on the campaign, spoken to the media, and taught parents how to advocate for their children. "This work has empowered me to stand up for my child and others with diabetes," she says.

