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Putting best shoe forward

Nike exec rounds up apparel for evacuees

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For most of us, the closest we come to getting our picture taken with a celebrity is posing with Elvis at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum.

Not so for Vada Manager of Ahwatukee Foothills.

Stroll through his home and you'll see not only family portraits with his wife and five children, but also Manager in photos with Hillary Clinton, Muhammad Ali, Larry King and Ken Griffey Jr.

He even has pictures of his trip to Vietnam with Bill Clinton in November 2000 on the first presidential visit to that country in more than 30 years.

Manager, 44, has a strong background in politics - working with two governors of Arizona and the mayor of Washington, D.C. - but that's not what called him to Asia.

Instead, he traveled there as director of global management issues for Nike, which has extensive operations in Vietnam. Now he's bringing Nike to the Valley by arranging for a donation of \$50,000 worth of shoes and apparel to victims of Hurricane Katrina who have relocated here. It's part of Nike's total donation of \$3.5 million in products and \$500,000 cash nationwide.

Though most of the evacuees have left Veterans Memorial Coliseum, the Salvation Army is still processing them, Manager said, and can distribute the goods based on size and need.

"They assured me the product will get to the people who need it," he said.

## **Captain of tennis team**

Manager was born in November 1961 and grew up in East St. Louis, Ill. His grandfather, who had played in the Negro Leagues, named him after baseball player Vada Pinson. Despite his grandfather's love of baseball, Manager ended up as captain of his high school tennis team, a game he loves to this day. His career would eventually immerse him in sports of all kinds, though not on the court or field.

After visiting an uncle during his junior year of high school, Manager moved to Arizona in 1979 to attend Arizona State University.

"I could have gone to Atlanta or Chicago or New York," he said. "Arizona was so welcoming to people with energy and new ideas. You didn't have to wait for someone to retire to make a difference in the community. You can form relationships fast and become part of the community fabric very quickly."

At ASU, he was appointed student member of the Board of Regents. That's how he met Neil Giuliano, who was student body president.

"He is so good at interacting with people at all levels," Giuliano said. "He treats everybody exactly the same, from the corporate CEO to the guy handing him his lunch in the cafeteria line."

"I think that's what draws people to him and allows him to do great things for all sorts of causes. . . . The bottom line is, success is quite often about relationships over time."

## **Assistant to governor**

After college, Manager went on to work at the Arizona Department of Commerce and became a special assistant to Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt. He helped Babbitt and later Michael Dukakis with their presidential aspirations.

Later, Manager worked as press secretary and adviser to Gov. Rose Mofford and in Washington, D.C., Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly.

In 1994, he was named vice president of Powell Tate public relations agency in Washington, D.C., handling clients such as the PGA Tour, Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer. He worked with baseball team owners during the player strike of 1994-95.

Also in 1995 with Powell Tate, Manager traveled to South Africa to help provide media training to Nelson Mandela's cabinet officers and local officials, who were previously revolutionaries. He has a framed, signed *Newsweek* cover in his office from Feb. 19, 1990, showing Mandela and announcing his freedom.

Manager worked as a senior manager for global communication for Levi Strauss & Co. in San Francisco from 1995 to 1997. That year, Nike recruited him after they became one of several companies targeted by a public outcry over labor practices overseas.

"I think a lot more companies have realized how important the cross-pollination is" between business and politics, Manager said. "They see how politics affect their business."

## **Living in Ahwatukee**

With Nike, Manager has been on numerous television shows as a spokesman and serves as an in-house counselor, adviser and strategist to senior management. Although company headquarters are in Oregon, he lives most of the time in Ahwatukee thanks to a combination of traveling and telecommuting.

When he started with Nike, Manager moved to Oregon, but after marrying his wife, Charlene, in September 1999, he began to base himself here.

His wife had three children when they married - Elyse Lever, now 21, Garrett Lever, 17, and Marcus Lever, 15 - and they had two more children together: Trent, who is almost 6, and Ava, 17 months.

Manager starts his day at 5:45 or 6 a.m. on the treadmill, then helps get the kids off to school. At about 8 a.m., he goes into his sports memorabilia-laden office, and about 8 p.m. goes back in for a second shift for another couple of hours on the phone or e-mail communicating with Nike managers and other business contacts in Asia and Australia. Behind his chair is an Olympics flag and a map of the world; it's necessary because the job has taken him to every continent except Antarctica. Across the room is a big-screen TV with a camera on top so he can video conference.

Manager said he misses the camaraderie of an office, but when he's home, he can be in the pool or at the dinner table with his kids. And he feels a loyalty to Arizona because of the nurturing he got here as a young professional.

"It's a good quality of life," he said. "I may be asked to go somewhere else in the U.S. or another part of the world, but I think I'll always try to reserve a corner of Arizona, and Ahwatukee in particular, for myself and my family."