

## *Atlanta INtown*

### **Charity in the City: What is May without Mother's Day?**

By Kate Atwood

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What is May without Mother's Day? I love this time of year when we stop to really appreciate moms. Moms are some of the biggest givers in our community and deserve all the praise possible during this special time.

I find great inspiration in moms who are making a difference inside and outside their homes. This is exactly why I have chosen to dedicate this month's column and my Mother's Day to Rita Young.

Rita Young is a mom, a professional, a volunteer and an activist. For years, these were all puzzle pieces in her life. A year ago, however, she was able to put these puzzle pieces together when she took on the role of public policy director for a non-profit organization called All About Developmental Disabilities (AADD).

AADD, located in Ansley Park, is Georgia's top provider of needed services, education, and effective advocacy for children, adults, and families living with developmental disabilities. The organization's statement is loud and clear: people with developmental disabilities, and their families, are among the most challenged and excluded people in society.

As its director of public policy, Rita serves as the organization's leading voice each week as she lobbies legislation to improve the opportunities and treatment of our state's citizens living with developmental disabilities. As a mother raising a family that faces such challenges, her voice is filled with personal passion and purpose.

Rita's passion to help comes from her own personal experience. When Rita's two boys were young, ages 3 and 2, they both were diagnosed with autism – a disability that affects an estimated 1.5 million people in the United States each year.

She spent many of those early years at home, taking care of her boys. It was a full-time job just getting them to their therapies five days a week. Her goal was focused and simple: to make her boys happy and give them every opportunity to thrive.

As she got more involved, she realized just how many families faced similar struggles. Informally, she began to connect to other parents and served as a

catalyst for them to find the help they needed. In fact, it is this connection to other parents navigating the unpredictable path of raising children with disabilities that led her to her position today with AADD.

Most of Rita's job involves her testifying at the Capitol on behalf of the families she meets. She loves her job because it impacts so many others, including her own two sons. Rita is able to enjoy her dream job with AADD and still enjoy a dream day that includes seeing her two sons, now 17 and 15 years old, smile. Says Young, "The best days are when I see a grin on both of my sons' faces; when we can all laugh out loud at life. That's important to remember, that there is humor in all of it, good times and bad."