

by Elyse Glickman

Okobos Shoes



A Walk to Remember

While some great designer shoe brands have kicked up their heels for celebrities at **GBK's pre-award show suites**, nobody has stepped things up quite like **Okobos**, which bowed at the **2009 GBK Emmy Awards** celebration and ran with its popularity at the **2010 Golden Globes event at the Mondrian Hotel**.

As far as active shoes go, Okobos **shoes for men and women** have it all—great colors, orthotic insides, durable materials and the fashion-forward extra of interchangeable accents (Okobits) fastened into place with a patented “tri-lobe” mechanism that echoes the brand name. As a brand, however, Okobos—the brainchild of **Michelle and Tom Juza**—is far more than just fashion for fun and profit. When one purchases a pair of Okobos shoes from okobos.com, **a portion of the proceeds goes to the Okobos Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to supporting causes that empower children and families in need**. In other words, when you buy Okobos for yourself or a loved one, it is a gift of happiness to others, and to yourself.

“Tom and I always dream big, but not just for ourselves,” says Michelle Juza. “We are not the kind of people who sit and wait for opportunity to knock. **We realize that for some families, there is no door on which opportunity can knock, because there isn't a door—in fact, there isn't a house.** There are some mothers and fathers who must put their children to bed--knowing that their bellies ache with hunger. And still, in 2009, there are the parents who must watch, in agony, as their child withers away from a treatable disease; just because they did not have access to proper medical attention. These parents do not love their children any less than we love ours. These are the families that we dream for. As a new footwear company in an already crowded marketplace, exposure is key. The only way we can carry out **the mission behind the Okobos brand is to create awareness and sell the shoes.** Our intent and goal is to include consumers on our journey... keeping them informed and updated as to where the funds--funds that they have helped to generate, are going. Okobos is ultimately less about fashion and more about a passion for philanthropy. **People who buy and wear the shoes, we hope, will feel the emotional connection with the brand and recognize all of the thought that went into the very design of the shoes to reinforce our commitment to making a difference.**”

Given that the Juza's outreach and fundraising extends around the world (with other partner charities including **The Kenyan Boys Choir, The United Way, National Down Syndrome Society, Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation, Project Clean Water and Pulaski Rugby**), the name “Okobos” is an apt name for the product line. Through Japanese etymology, the word describes the very high, wooden shoes worn by a geisha in training. Besides being a memorable name, Michelle also appreciated the fact that the three “o's” in the word reminded her of the Zen circle and the cycle of life. It also resonates because the shoes' *raison d'être*, as spelled out on the web site, gives these diverse charities a high platform to stand on.

“Consumers looking for more than just another pair of shoes might find emotional benefit in a pair of Okobos,” points out Tom Juza. **“Every sale made by the Okobos Company represents a donation to the Okobos Foundation.** In essence, The Okobos Company provides the base on which the Okobos Foundation can be built. I believe most people are good and want to help others, and they will do so if they have access to a simple way to give. Okobos is about being good to your feet, being good to others and feeling good about it---all at the same time!”

While **one lucky winner** will receive a pair of Okobos sandals and an interchangeable tri-lobe accent. We encourage everybody to consider buying a pair of these good-for-all shoes at store.okobos.com