

# THE POWER OF GIVING

profiles by BEN SWENSON  
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Last year, Americans gave nearly \$428 billion to charity – roughly \$1,300 for every man, woman and child in the country. The amount of money devoted to charitable causes was larger than the individual economies of all but 15 states.

No matter the reason for giving, or what it looks like, there are always stories behind the philanthropy. We hear in this section from eight different philanthropists

about what compels them to give. These are people who have offered their time, talent and financial resources for the good of the community.

Ultimately their stories are key to nurturing a more philanthropic society. “If you get people to believe, they give,” says Kathy Laing, program manager for the Institute on Philanthropy at the University of Richmond. >>

## HELPING SOCIETY ACHIEVE GOALS

# BOBBY FREEMAN

**The rhythm of work and routine** can obscure the beauty of our world, but in Newport News there are conspicuous glimpses of artistry meant to brighten our surroundings. One local businessman has played a major role in making those encounters possible.

Robert L. “Bobby” Freeman Jr. is CEO of Tower Park Management Corporation, a property management firm based in Newport News. The son of a well-known community pillar, Freeman has, like his father, forged a successful path in business, and cultivated a devotion to sharing that prosperity with his neighbors.

Part of Freeman’s appreciation for his hometown can be found in the Newport News Public Art Foundation, which he founded nearly 20 years ago to enhance city life through public sculpture. By placing permanent, grand-scale artwork in special locations throughout the city, the foundation aims to inspire pride, add beauty and pleasure to the community, and cultivate a unique identity.

Among the 20 pieces of artwork around Newport News is the graceful, crouching form of *Selene*. The 7-foot sculpture of white marble by María Gamundí rests on a small pond island in a natural setting between Mariners’ Museum Park and the James River. And there’s *Hammer Tribute*, a 16-foot nod to the eponymous tool, fashioned from plates of Pittsburgh steel by Jim Benedict and sitting at an intersection in the city’s industrial and commercial district, Oyster Point.

Freeman’s love of place can also be found in the artists that regularly visit the mixed-use development Port Warwick, which he helped bring to the city in the early 2000s. The Port Warwick Foundation is a nonprofit organization that hosts public and performing arts events such as the Port Warwick Art & Sculpture Festival and the Port Warwick Summer Concert Series.

The activities the organization hosts have “grown phenomenally since they started,” Freeman says, “and provided quality of life activities for the community, which I saw was a real void.”

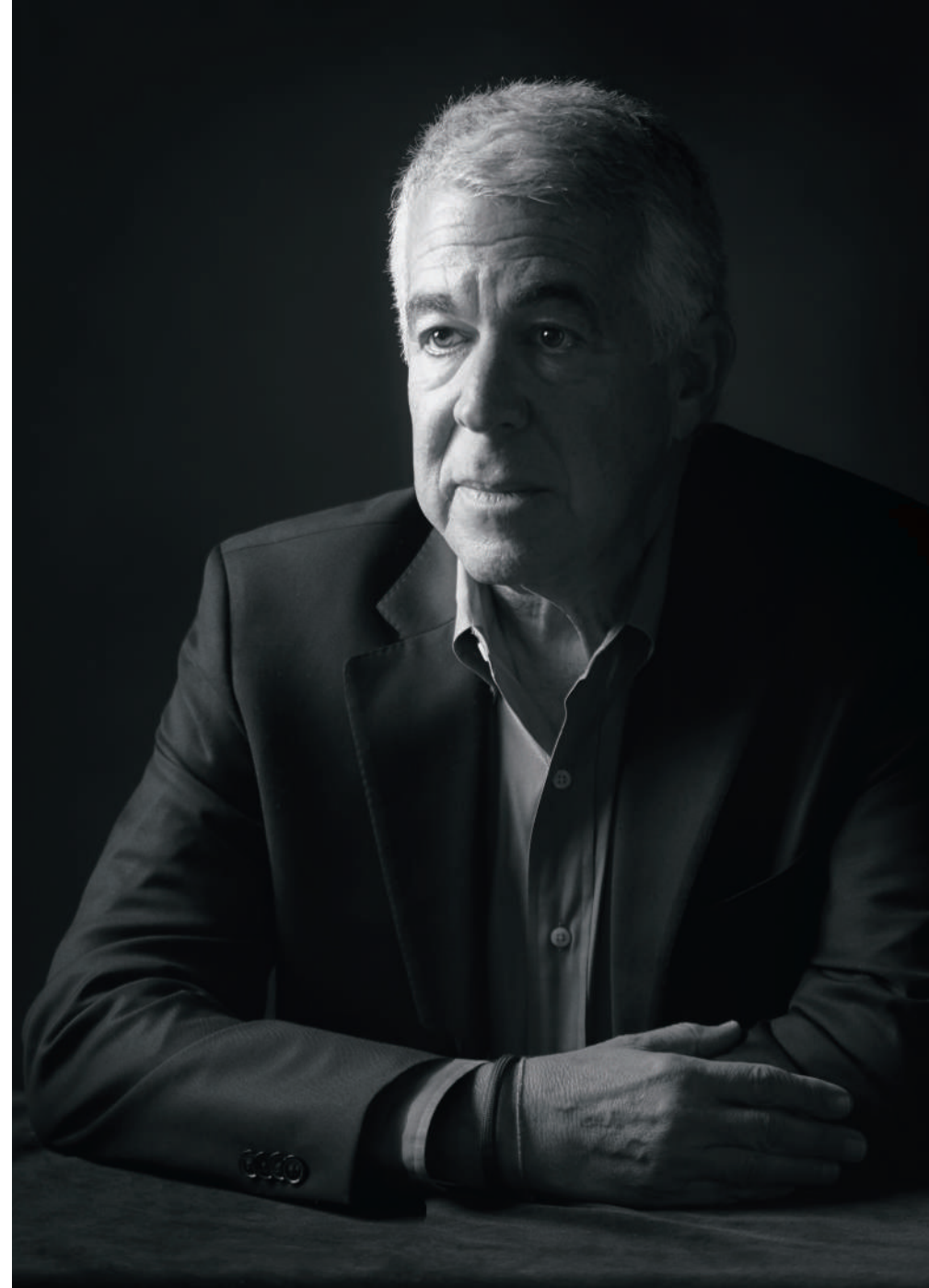
Freeman is now stepping back from the Newport News Public Art Foundation and Port Warwick Foundation to make sure that those organizations prosper after he’s gone.

The arts have been a major component of his philanthropy; he has also backed institutions such as Peninsula Fine Arts Center and The Mariners’ Museum and Park. But he has supported schools, too, among them Peninsula Montessori School, Hampton Roads Academy and Christopher Newport University.

Freeman says his desire to endorse so many causes can be traced back to the unflinching generosity of his father, Robert L. Freeman Sr., and all the civic leaders of that generation. “Dad said yes to everyone,” he says.

His father believed philanthropy allows civil society to accomplish goals that have virtually no chance of significant government funding. “Private philanthropy adds to the culture of a community in a way that could not happen through government support alone,” he says.





## HELPING RUNS IN THE FAMILY

# THE STRELITZ FAMILY

**“We have to give back to the community that has supported us so well,”**

– E.J. Strelitz

The Strelitz family’s penchant for charitable giving has roots in the world’s darkest hour. E.J. Strelitz, CEO of Virginia Beach-based Haynes Furniture, says the previous generation of his family, including his father Leonard Strelitz, witnessed the Holocaust during the formative years of adulthood.

Like other American Jews, the Strelitzes felt a sense of powerlessness to save their brethren because the Jewish community in the United States at the time did not have the collective political and economic strength it does today. “That left a very big mark on my father,” Strelitz says.

That experience would be the foundation of a furniture empire known as much for philanthropy as for business acumen.

The Strelitz family first took over Haynes Furniture when patriarch Ellis Strelitz bought the Downtown Norfolk furniture store in 1930. Since then, various family members have filled top executive positions in the company, and all of them have displayed a sense of obligation to share their good fortune with people in need.

In the years after World War II, the family business was booming, and by the 1960s Leonard Strelitz and his family were making regular trips overseas to help Israel and its citizens adjust to statehood. He also assumed leadership roles in local and national Jewish support organizations.

That philanthropic spirit continued long after the fate of the Jewish nation and its citizens worldwide stabilized. The family has made gifts to honor their cultural and religious background, taking prominent roles in Jewish causes. But the family never restricted their largesse to a single cause.

There was plenty of family discussion about supporting their Jewish heritage, says E.J. Strelitz, “but in the same breath, there was a lot of talk about supporting our community here.”

Eastern Virginia Medical School’s Strelitz Diabetes Center was named to honor the significant gifts and fundraising of the family. Acts of kindness were a hallmark of the family’s generosity as well. Leonard Strelitz’s 1999 *Daily Press* obituary recalled a time that he furnished an entire home for a family of Laotian refugees in need.

E.J. Strelitz, his wife Randi (Haynes’ executive vice president) and other family members continue to contribute money and time to a host of local and national causes large and small. They recently gave \$5,000 to the Virginia Beach Tragedy Fund, created by the United Way of South Hampton Roads to help victims of the mass shooting in May.

Strelitz sees the preservation of this charitable legacy as a sort of a tax on their success. “We have to give back to the community that has supported us so well,” he says.

David Brand, a former Haynes executive, current president and CEO of Alliance for Global Good and E.J. Strelitz’s brother-in-law, says that the success of the furniture business has afforded the family the opportunity to drive giving among others in the community, such as Haynes employees. “The benefit of philanthropy is not only the end user but also when we let our associates know the things we’re doing and engage and encourage their support,” Brand says.





## PLANTING SEEDS THAT GROW

# GOODY TYLER & BEE MCLEOD

Top: Goody Tyler; opposite: Bee McLeod.

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When officials at The College of William & Mary broke ground on a wellness center in 2017, H. Elizabeth “Bee” McLeod and J. Goodenow “Goody” Tyler III were among those ceremonially hurling the first shovels of dirt.

The goal behind the center, which opened in 2018, is to provide a holistic approach to wellness that helps take the edge off of campus life. McLeod and Tyler endorsed the idea with a gift well into seven figures.

Wellness is central to the couple’s marriage – they met one another on a New Year’s Day run – and to the causes they support. With their careers behind them and much of their lives now largely devoted to looking outward, McLeod and Tyler are using the power of philanthropy to show that well-being comes in many forms.

McLeod has decades of business experience, most recently with Cox Communications and formerly with Landmark Communications. Tyler is a retired nurse anesthetist who worked both in the U.S. Army and in public hospitals in Virginia and North Carolina.

Keeping fit is second nature for the couple, who reside in Norfolk. McLeod ran competitively, was a triathlete and served as president of both Tidewater Striders and Road Runners Club of America. Tyler participated recreationally and has been on the governing boards of those organizations.

But they both understand that strength and endurance are just one part of a continuum. And supporting total well-being requires deliberate commitments, which is why they have shared their wealth with numerous causes.

Their contributions to schools voice an endorsement for the transformative power of education. The couple funds three scholarships at McLeod’s high school alma mater, Notre Dame High School in Lawrence, New Jersey, and their first significant support of William & Mary, where McLeod earned an undergraduate degree in 1983 and an MBA eight years later, went to the school’s library and school of business.

Since then, the couple has offered financial support for numerous William & Mary endeavors. Through the years, the couple has also been active on the boards for the William & Mary’s library, capital campaign and philanthropic foundation, which funds priorities with private money.

The McLeod Tyler Wellness Center, named to honor their generosity, opened on the campus in August 2018, and offers a range of services for students and faculty including recreational and fitness programming, mindfulness classes and professional counseling, everything from yoga to therapy. McLeod says the wellness center is a haven for psychological relief.

It’s that sort of big picture approach to well-being that has steered the couple’s attention toward other causes, such as Camp Dreamcatcher, a Pennsylvania-based organization that offers year-



round programming for children affected by HIV and AIDS.

Puppies Behind Bars is an organization that allows inmates to train service animals, many of whom find their forever homes alongside first responders and veterans. The couple has also been significant supporters of Norfolk Botanical Garden, where McLeod serves on the board of directors.

Leading by conspicuous example was not the couple’s first choice, McLeod says. But ultimately that gesture sets an example. As a result, she says, “we’ve shown a younger person how to give.”

Tyler says that the commitments he and his wife are making are investments in people as much as they are in institutions. It’s ultimately about planting a seed that grows for a long time. “We get more in return than we give,” says Tyler. “The money comes back tenfold.”



## AN OBLIGATION TO SHARE

SHIRLEY  
LIVERMAN

**Shirley Liverman will never forget** something her father said the first time she earned money babysitting. Not all of that belongs to you, he told her. She needed to set aside some for others.

Liverman took that message to heart. And she would one day marry a man, Milton R. Liverman, who shared the same values.

The bonds that held the couple together were so strong that Milton's death in 2017 only strengthened her resolve to live generously as a homage to his life. Out of that desire came the Dr. Milton R. Liverman Memorial Scholarship, which helps Suffolk students pursue higher education.

The scholarship is presented to selected student applicants in Suffolk Public Schools with a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher who have financial need and show potential for leadership.

The Livermans, both lifelong educators, met at Booker T. Washington Intermediate School. Shirley was a teacher. Milton was assistant principal. Their love developed alongside their careers. Milton eventually became superintendent of Suffolk Public Schools, a position he held for 10 years. All told, Milton and Shirley worked in public education for 37 and 38 years, respectively.

The Livermans, who both came from relatively humble beginnings, were able to achieve a level of prosperity, in part, through the generosity of others. "We were able to attain what we did because of financial assistance," she says.

So, when Milton died of a rare form of cancer in 2017, Shirley knew a scholarship was the best way to honor his legacy. Through the Hampton Roads Community Foundation and the Suffolk Education Foundation, Shirley has already been through two rounds of awards in 2018 and 2019.

It has been three years since she lost her husband, and Shirley says she's still not 100 percent sure of her purpose without him. But the scholarship is a good start, and there's definitely more philanthropy to come. She inherited from her mother a tidy house on Godwin Boulevard in Suffolk that she knows will soon be put to good use, but its true intention is not yet clear.

But there is an unmistakable theme driving her path forward. "When you've been blessed, you have an obligation to share that with others," she says.







**Much of their philanthropic drive rests in their identity. Pence and Wells co-chaired a \$1 million capital campaign for Richmond Triangle Players, a nonprofit theater company that stages performances to support and emphasize LGBTQ issues.**

Mac Pence and Jeff Wells have led their lives with foresight and vision – in their professional callings, in their relationship to one another, and in the commitment they’ve made to leave the world a better place than they found it.

Now, as the couple approaches their 60s, they continue to believe that big goals require ambitious intention.

Pence is a Richmonder who majored in business at Furman University, and eventually became president of the Pence Auto Group dealerships. Wells grew up in Tidewater, a Kempsville High School grad who studied English and law, and whose legal career eventually took him to Richmond as an attorney for the Office of Staff Council for the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. In 2008, the men opened a bed and breakfast, Maury Place at Monument, which had a successful six-year run. Today they share a handsome home in Richmond’s Fan District.

Long before same-sex marriage became legal in the United States in 2015, Pence and Wells formally committed their lives to one another. They had a union ceremony in their home in 1999, and 10 years later legally married in Boston.

Service has been part of their mutual identity from the beginning. Pence has served on the board of CEDEPCA USA, which helps educate and empower women in Guatemala, and chaired the board of directors of what’s now Diversity Richmond, an LGBTQ advocacy group. Wells has always had an affinity for performing arts, and serves as president of Richmond Allied Voices, a nonprofit that supports performance ensembles.

The men have also made significant financial commitments and through the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond created the PenWel Fund, which provides grants for acute needs in some of the world’s poorest areas.

Pence says that organizing is just as important as individual gifts. They’ve always tried to be available “to help nonprofits appeal to donors,” he says.

Often the proposals they champion are large-scale. Pence and Wells co-chaired two successful capital campaigns. The first was a \$5 million appeal for their church, Richmond’s Second Presbyterian Church. The men say they were brought up to believe in the religious and more duty to help others.

Much of their philanthropic drive rests in their identity, too. Pence and Wells co-chaired a \$1 million capital campaign for Richmond Triangle Players, a nonprofit theater company that stages performances to support and emphasize LGBTQ issues.

When Pence and Wells decide where to spend their time and energy, “we are tuned into whether these organizations are open to and accepting of LGBTQ communities,” Wells says.

Although watching good work bear fruit is gratifying, the men emphasize that the sacrifice it takes to get there requires chutzpah, and a willingness to step out of one’s comfort zone.

In initial discussions about what the goal of the Richmond Triangle Players’ capital campaign should be, \$500,000 was a figure floating around in discussions, according to Wells. An advisor convinced organizers to aim for double that amount, a target they settled on and one that vigorous fundraising eventually helped achieve.

That experience also imparted an important lesson about courageous conviction. “It’s important to set a high bar and believe in it,” Wells says. ■

SET A HIGH BAR, AND BELIEVE IN IT

# MAC PENCE & JEFF WELLS

# Riding uncertain rails

The future of philanthropy without Norfolk Southern.

by VICTORIA BOURNE

**W**hen the Norfolk Southern Corporation quietly began operating from its new downtown Norfolk headquarters in 1982, an editorial in *The Virginian-Pilot* lauded the company's arrival.

A small staff of about 75 had come from Roanoke, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, half of them principal executives expected to not only live in Norfolk, but become active participants in civic, religious, cultural and political affairs.

And that's just what they did. They joined boards. They volunteered. They donated money. In the ensuing decades, the company's reach has extended to dozens of organizations across Hampton Roads devoted to human services, the arts, education and the environment.

So late last year, when Norfolk Southern announced it would relocate to Atlanta by summer of 2021 – taking with it around 500 employees – local nonprofits got nervous.

"My heart sank," says Thaler McCormick, CEO of ForKids. "Throughout our organization, we're very aware of how important Norfolk Southern has been to us."

It's ultimately unclear what size or shape philanthropic hole will be left in Norfolk Southern's wake, but no one seems keen to see them go. From 2012 to 2018, the company – by way of its foundation created in 1983 to oversee charitable giving – contributed nearly \$14 million locally, according to a review of online annual reports. And that's not including employee matching funds, which reached at least \$157,000 last year.

"I don't think Norfolk Southern's philanthropy will end in Hampton Roads," McCormick says. "It will decline. And I do think

this community is strong enough to sustain it, but we need everybody stepping forward to fill the void."

If nonprofits are the beating heart of a community, donors the likes of Norfolk Southern are their lifeblood. And the benefit of their largesse stretches beyond good feelings and pretty statues.

In 2012, there were more than 2,000 public charity nonprofit organizations in Hampton Roads paying approximately \$2.6 billion in employee wages and benefits, according to a 2015 report by Old Dominion University.

McCormick says Norfolk Southern was a "game changer," for ForKids, one of the largest providers for homeless families in the state.

Last year, the nonprofit received \$200,000, but McCormick estimates the company has given more than a million in the past decade. It also was the first corporation to jump on a capital campaign toward the nonprofit's new regional headquarters, which recently broke ground in Chesapeake.

"And of course, when Norfolk Southern said, 'We believe in this,' ... the rest of the philanthropic community followed, too," McCormick says.

Elena Montello, director of development of the Hope House Foundation, says there are a lot of great corporations in the area, but Norfolk Southern went "above and beyond" to support her organization's unique mission, which is to provide services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their own homes.

Individual donors are the engine that drives most nonprofits – Montello says they make up 86 percent of her donor base – but corporate giving plays an important role. Over the past 15 years, Nor-





# “I don't think we would be where we are artistically without Norfolk Southern's support over all that time.”

— Karen Phillion, Virginia Symphony Orchestra

folk Southern grants have gone toward the nonprofit's affordable housing campaign, rehabilitating apartments for people with disabilities and the purchase of wheelchair accessible passenger vans.

“They understand that a community is only a community when everyone has the ability to be part of (it),” Montello says. “It's going to be a huge loss not having them around.”

The Fortune 500 company won't be leaving the area entirely; Norfolk Southern Chairman, President and CEO Jim Squires told *The Pilot* last year that operations at the Port of Virginia, particularly its Lambert's Point terminal, are to continue.

And Norfolk Mayor Kenny Alexander told the paper he was optimistic the company would remain active locally, citing “a record of maintaining relationships with charities and other nonprofit organizations” even as employee presence dwindled. The projected economic impact of Norfolk Southern's relocation is expected to be about \$6.1 million, which includes philanthropic donations through the charitable foundation and employee matches, as well as money spent at restaurants and for other goods and services, *The Pilot* reported.

Nonprofit leaders on the other side of the state expressed similar concerns four years ago when Norfolk Southern announced plans to shutter its downtown Roanoke office and eliminate 500 jobs. From toy and food drives, to monetary donations and volunteerism, nonprofit leaders told *The Roanoke Times* in 2015 that they'd come to count on the generosity of the railroad company and its employees.

According to Katie Fletcher, executive director of the Norfolk Southern Foundation, funding in that city still goes to places like the foodbank and Blue Ridge Literacy, but overall support has dropped roughly by half since 2015, from \$500,000 annually to \$250,000.

Fletcher has shepherded the company's charitable giving since 2010. The conversations since the announcement in Hampton Roads haven't been easy, she says, but she was able to tell long-time beneficiaries early this year what kind of support to expect until 2021 so they can plan accordingly.

What future funding will look like after that, she can't say, but she expects giving to continue in the areas of basic needs, human services, the environment and education — just not at previous levels. However, she adds, “We've decided to move away from arts funding.”

Norfolk Southern has provided annual operating support to organizations like the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, which Karen Phillion, president and CEO, calls “the mother's milk of nonprofits” because it allows them to apply the funding wherever it's needed most.

For the orchestra, that includes paying musicians' salaries. Stable, consistent contributions from Norfolk Southern over the course of three decades has helped the Virginia Symphony develop into a nationally recognized performing arts organization, Phillion says.

“I don't think we would be where we are artistically without Norfolk Southern's support over all that time.”

The orchestra received \$75,000 in 2018 and will see a gradual step down in funding over the next few years.

Fletcher says she hopes companies will step up their corporate giving programs in Hampton Roads, but charitable organizations also need to be thinking about how to operate more efficiently and look for other sources of financial support; some have already successfully secured major grants from outside the area, she notes.

But it's not just about the money, say nonprofit leaders in Hampton Roads. Boards around the community have functioned at a higher level as a result of Norfolk Southern executives who have occupied those chairs.

“I mean, there has been someone connected with Norfolk Southern on our board probably ever since they came to town,” says Virginia Symphony's Phillion. “And that expertise is really invaluable.”

Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, executive director of the Elizabeth River Project, says the company has a culture of community engagement, not just with dollars, but with time and thought.

“I'd say that's made as much difference as the dollars, really,” she says, noting that Squires, the company's top executive, and his wife, Karen, were honored in November for their outstanding philanthropy.

Good corporate citizenship is something that has been instilled from the top down, says Fletcher, “which, you know, is not true for all companies.” They recognize the impact leaving will have on the area but hope what remains is a community better off than when the company arrived, three-plus decades ago.

Nonprofit leaders agree Norfolk Southern has been a philanthropic giant in every way. It's a legacy they need others to follow. ■



# TALKING PHILANTHROPY

*Fundraising isn't easy. There's a number of worthwhile endeavors seeking our hard-earned dollars and many ways to give. So the people whose job it is to raise money for nonprofits have to wear many hats: cheerleader, organizer, matchmaker, liaison. Raising money is the goal, but building relationships is the means. We sat down with Nicole Pellegrino, president of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Hampton Roads chapter and director of development at Norfolk Collegiate, to discuss philanthropy, giving trends and challenges.*

## How do you define philanthropy?

Philanthropy is more than just a transaction. It is really a connection to a cause that someone is passionate about and that they feel they are able to be a part of making a significant change through their involvement, whether that be money, time or other treasures and talents.

## AFP has existed for 50 years and the local chapter was founded in 2001. What is the role of the fundraising professional and why is the AFP important?

There are a booming number of nonprofits in our area. It's obviously a strong sector for our economy, for our professionals. Some people don't think of fundraising as a career, but the professionals need the background, the tools, the resources because we are working with some amazing philanthropists and donors. And our role, when you boil it down, is that we are linking them and allowing them to have a joyful experience with helping in the organization.

Education is probably the big tenet of what AFP Global provides to the members. On a local level, we host monthly luncheons for our membership and nonmembers. We typically bring in local experts from our community who talk on a variety of topics from donor stewardship to direct-mail giving and multi-phase communications. We have a little bit of everything.

## What philanthropic trends are you seeing?

The changing landscape of fundraising is women ... from all different cultural backgrounds. Women are expected to inherit 70 percent of the inter-generational wealth over the next 50 years. And on

average, they're living six years longer than men. So, when you look at it from that standpoint, they're the ones who are going to be making longer-term decisions with wealth. And married and single women are more likely to give and give at higher amounts than similarly situated men.

## Can only older, wealthy people be philanthropists?

No. We have to be willing to think of philanthropy as young philanthropists, too. Even if they're giving is smaller, in the future they may have those means to be able to give significantly. People of any means can be involved and be a part of our culture of philanthropy. It doesn't always have to be about the dollar amount.

## What fundraising challenges are unique to our area?

We have a very generous community. There are so many ways that they can be involved, that we have to really reach out and know those donors. Another way that makes Hampton Roads interesting is that we are a military and a transient community. You make these great relationships, but then they have to leave us at some point. And that's hard. And it's sad. You see with Norfolk Southern [that] our landscape of corporations in the area are changing. We want to attract people to come and stay in our area and be lifelong philanthropists.

## The AFP was instrumental in the creation of the Donor Bill of Rights. Why was that important?

Unfortunately, there have been scandals that take place within nonprofits in the past and they'll be more. It's about having clear and transparent ways of doing business. So, the donor as the consumer, so

## with Nicole Pellegrino

to speak, has rights. And we as the nonprofit organization also have a promise to them to do right by the funds that they're giving us. It's also become very important for nonprofits to have gift acceptance policies for similar reasons. Who will you accept a gift from? If they've done certain things, what will you do?

## What are you optimistic about when it comes to philanthropy?

I think there's been a lot of uncertainty about the tax laws that we've seen changing, but I'm optimistic that people give to things that they care about more so than for a tax break. When you adjust for inflation, we did see a little bit of a decrease in overall giving last year, but we're still giving at phenomenal levels. And then also, our younger generation. They have the tools at their fingertips to really get behind what they're passionate about and you're seeing them start this sort of wave of young activists and I love it.

## What worries you?

Nothing's insurmountable. We have our daily fears, especially as a fundraising professional, about the expectations that are put on us to raise the funds we need because we have seen government funding change. Individuals still give the most, but we rely on them so, so much. Many of us have a small set of donors that are giving large amounts. And what if that changed? A concern as a whole is the retention of our donors, especially in times when we see less and less government funding. ■

*— interview by Victoria Bourne; condensed and edited for clarity and space.*





# Philanthropy is diverse

by BEN SWENSON

**V**ivian Oden is looking to leverage the power of African American altruism by creating a formal giving circle that brings together local African American philanthropists to help solve problems facing black communities.

While African Americans are quick to help neighbors in need and offer disposable income for the greater good, their kindness rarely garners much attention. The churches and fraternal societies, as well as the civil rights and social-welfare causes that benefit from their charity often lack the glitzy publicity of larger nonprofits.

The Hampton Roads Community Foundation has started Visionaries for Change in hopes it can harness the power of that overlooked segment of giving. The organization works with donors to create funds that make grants for charitable causes.

A giving circle is a variation of the traditional endowment started by an individual or family. “Not everyone has \$25,000 to start a fund at the foundation, but people can come together to make change in the community,” says Oden, the organization’s vice president for special projects. “It allows the foundation to engage people who we might not otherwise have engaged.”

A 2012 report by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation found that nearly two-thirds of African American households give to charitable causes, a collective impact of some \$11 billion annually. And African Americans donate 25 percent more of their income than their white neighbors, a trend that only increases the more African Americans earn.

In 2018, Oden spearheaded an effort to bring the traveling exhibition “Giving Back: The Soul of Philanthropy Reframed and Exhibited” to Norfolk’s Slover Library. The exhibition, created by writer Valaida Fullwood and photographer Charles W. Thomas Jr., “used photography to tell the story of black philanthropy,” Oden says.

Also that year, Oden was accepted into a leadership program focused on diversity, and produced a report called “Missing Voices in Philanthropy,” which aimed to increase participation in charitable giving by different ethnic minorities such as African Americans, Filipinos and Asian-Indians.

Many well-known leaders in the local African American community were eager to join the organization, including L.D. Britt, professor of surgery at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Oden herself signed on as one of the giving circle’s founding members.

The board of Hampton Roads Community Foundation endorsed the idea of Visionaries for Change in a big way, approving a \$200,000 matching grant. The funds represent “a collective voice about supporting education, healthcare and other important causes in the black community,” Oden says.

More importantly, they underscore what organizers of good causes have known for generations. “Kindness doesn’t look one particular way,” she says. “Philanthropy is diverse.” ■

