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What is philanthropy? Those in know explain

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By Deirdre Maloney
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It's a word we hear more and more often, but we're not always sure how to define it.

Philanthropy.

We know what it means to care about an issue or a cause. But where does philanthropy come into the picture? How can we use it to improve upon the things we care about?

Finding the answer is easy. Just ask any one of the leaders of San Diego's largest community foundations.

“Philanthropy is the link between our vision, our values and our resources,” says Marjory Kaplan, President and CEO of the Jewish Community Foundation. “Philanthropy is when we match those resources to the causes we care about. It’s when we look around, when we ask ourselves ... what needs to be healed, what needs to be improved? How can I use what I’ve been given to benefit others?” Those resources can be anything, in any amount. Bob Kelly, President and CEO of The San Diego Foundation, defines philanthropy as the simple love of humanity. “It can take shape in both the heroic form, such as the first responder who runs into a burning building, or the simple example of showing your children how to give to what matters.”

And deciding just how to give is a very personal decision, says Christy Wilson, executive director of Rancho Santa Fe Foundation.

“Philanthropy is a very individual habit. It is not innate; it is learned. And like many things in life, people can and should learn their philanthropic habits from others.”

These three leaders understand philanthropy intimately because they spend every day making sure it happens effectively.

For Kelly, it’s all about connection. “We connect donors to the community and to each other,” he says. “We help them identify the areas in which they can create positive change and provide research to support that process. Sometimes we’ll also recommend the level and type of philanthropic investments, then follow up with information on the investment’s return.”

“Community foundations help make philanthropy easy for everyone,” says Kaplan. “They play an instrumental role in enhancing our region by promoting charitable giving, building endowments, engaging families in legacy planning, and assisting donors with efficient and informed grantmaking.”

When it comes down to it, community foundations make giving both more effective, more meaningful and more sustainable. Here are just a few examples as to how they do it.

Community foundations:

- Provide education and information for better giving choices
- Guide your giving during your lifetime, then help turn that giving into a meaningful legacy
- Help you create generations of givers in your family
- Offer a variety of funds (Donor-advised funds allow for grants large and small to organizations you care about)
- Are not just for the wealthy (Contributions can begin with just a few hundred dollars, and some foundations offer the opportunity to open a fund for less than \$2,000.)

Community foundations offer a credible, confidential and trusted resource for giving, one that thousands of families in San Diego already partner with for their giving strategies.