

## SPOTLIGHT



## SAN DIEGO'S FLOURISHING FOUNDATIONS

**Despite the Economic Crunch, Charitable Giving is Alive and Well.**

**S**an Diego is a fortunate town blessed with citizens with generous hearts and philanthropic good graces. Over the years, foundations have fueled the city's tremendous growth as a cosmopolitan thriving in arts, sciences, social services and education, while preserving its rich history and nurturing its citizens in need. From hospital wings and animal rescue services to children's literacy programs and foster care, the list of viable programs supported by foundations grows continuously.

In the 2008 to 2009 charitable year, the three leading local organizations—the San Diego Foundation, Jewish Community Foundation and Rancho Santa Fe Foundation (RSFF)—delivered upward of \$125 million in grants, an impressive amount considering the economic climate.

Established in 1975, the highly respected San Diego Foundation has granted more than \$650 million to local nonprofit organizations since its inception. It serves as an incubator for developing creative solutions to local issues. Foundation president and CEO Bob Kelly explains, "Recently, we worked with the Parker Foundation and Legler Benbough Foundation in producing a report about the future of Balboa Park, addressing the significant infrastructure problems and lack of clear governance. And now the mayor has announced a commission to develop plan of action for Balboa."

Another strong community contributor, the Jewish Community Foundation (JCF) is dedicated to helping people achieve their charitable goals and to keeping the Jewish and general community strong. While the Jewish population in

San Diego only numbers 100,000, this foundation has a most impressive track record. In 2008-2009, JCF awarded \$63.2 million in grants.

"We have incredibly generous donors," says Marjory Kaplan, JCF president and CEO. "It goes back to our traditions and belief in giving. We have really strong partnerships with community organizations and excel at matching donors with needs of community."

JCF also partnered with the United Jewish Federation of San Diego to create the Jewish Community Economic Recovery Fund, which targets people and organizations in immediate need and delivered more than \$800,000 in direct relief by putting food on tables, providing scholarships and helping vulnerable people like seniors on fixed incomes.

The efforts of smaller foundations such as the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation (RSFF) are proving that even small dona-

tions can make a huge impact. RSFF works with the more than 9,000 nonprofits in the San Diego region and, in 2008, made \$5.6 million in grants against its \$19 million in assets.

"Our mission is to promote effective philanthropy," says executive director Christy Wilson. "Since we are a smaller foundation, we try hard to take the money and leverage it with other donors and family foundations. Three years ago, we had a donor who wanted to make a difference at the Monarch School. We brought along 10 other donors to augment what we were doing, so it became a more impactful grant than we could do as a single community foundation."

### TOUGH TIMES CALL FOR STRONG LEADERS

While most everyone has felt the effects of the recession, it is times like these when philanthropy is most critical and essential. "People's generosity accelerates when the economy flourishes, but it is during decline when people need the most help," Kaplan says. "When the economic downturn really hit us last fall, we created five tips for giving during an economic dip and really reached out to our donors, which I think is why our grant numbers are so high this year."

"Certainly it's been tough times for charitable donations," Kelly adds, "but we have pushed forward despite most donors being more conservative with their flexible dollars. But last year we still made \$60 million in grants."

In addition to the economic slump, foundations must address new government regulations and laws like the Pension Prevention Act of 2006 and Sarbanes-Oxley that have created more internal work and paper trails. Wilson says it hasn't deterred anyone from donating.

Clearly, San Diego is in good hands with Kelly, Kaplan and Wilson at the foundational helm. These dedicated do-gooders exude passion, love their jobs and are serving as levers of positive change.

—ANN WYCOFF