

CORAL GABLES

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The Holiday Issue



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PHILANTHROPISTS' CHARITIES
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THE GIVERS

THE ART OF PHILANTHROPY IN CORAL GABLES

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PHOTOS BY JONATHAN DANN

The word itself tells the tale: Derived from the Latin roots for “loving” (philo) and mankind (anthropo), it means “love of mankind,” especially in the form of deeds of generosity and work for the good of others.

Here in Coral Gables, philanthropy is rampant. Partly it’s because we are an affluent community. Many affluent Gables residents either understand how tough life can be – having created their fortunes from scratch – or come from a family tradition of beneficence. What is as remarkable as their monetary generosity is the extent to which Gables philanthropists also give their time and energy. While the givers we recognize here are affluent, they give much more than money. Many are hands-on involved with the charities they love, helping to guide them and to raise additional funds.

Having lots of money, however, is not the point, says Thomas Abraham of the Abraham Foundation. “Each of us has the power to make a difference in other people’s lives,” he says. “If we all did our own little bit it would change the world. That is the message our foundation promotes. You don’t need to be rich... a respect for humanity can change the world, and it doesn’t take money for that.”

Indeed, while money can help a great deal, there is plenty of work to be done just by rolling up your proverbial sleeves and helping. “With these charitable organizations there is always the need for participants who can volunteer, take on chores and lead,” notes ambassador and philanthropist Chuck Cobb.

And while giving money to philanthropic causes may seem the province of families with

generations of wealth, many of Coral Gables’ most active givers came from modest backgrounds and see philanthropy as a way to help others who come from a similarly underprivileged place. “I grew up poor and believe that giving back is the grateful thing you can do... it’s about helping people in tough situations,” says attorney Aaron Podhurst. For such people, for whom a scholarship-based education proved critical in life, much of the charitable work focuses on helping raise money for schools, and for poor, but hardworking students.

In some cases, the philanthropy is based on deep religious convictions. This is the case with Trish and Dan Bell, whose latest charitable effort is the construction of an interfaith chapel at FIU. “Giving of course makes us feel good, but that is definitely not the primary reason we give,” says Trish. “We give because, for us, it is the proper response to having received so many blessings... This is actually not very different than what all of us learned in kindergarten – namely, that we all have an obligation to share.”

As former Florida Secretary of State Sue Cobb notes, “In the local community there are all kinds of different ways to help people. In the end, it is part of fulfilling our roles in life to help.”

And then there is simply the joy of giving, and how that makes you feel. Is it better to give than receive? “The feeling you get when you help someone out is indescribable,” says entrepreneur Matthew Meehan. “There is nothing you can buy, or anyplace you can travel to, that feels better than helping out a neighbor. That is a feeling I want to have over and over again.” ■

THE GIVER:
DAVID EVENSKY
FOCUS: THE FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

Charity and philanthropy have been an integral part not only of David Evensky's upbringing, but also of his entire professional life. As a principal of the firm founded by his father, Evensky Katz/Foldes Wealth Management, the Gables native has been involved in building and protecting the wealth of individuals for whom charitable causes are common.

"My family has always been philanthropic, and in a way my whole firm has gotten involved," he says. "We manage more than a billion dollars, and at our core competency we are financial planners. We look at everything [our clients] do, and we see how many of them are philanthropists... we've actually gotten involved in some of their charities."

While Evensky serves on many boards and supports local institutions such as the Coral Gables Museum, the Coral Gables Art Cinema, and the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, his current passion is to build a 20,000-square foot community center for the Friendship Circle, a nonprofit that takes care of children with autism.

One of their programs connects high school student volunteers with autistic kids, befriending them and spending time with them so that, among other things, their parents can get some respite.

"These [autistic] kids are isolated and don't have many friends," says Evensky. "A high school student is assigned to a child and provides some social interaction and friendship... It's a friendship program to help with the social fabric." It also teaches the volunteer students a sense of responsibility and giving.

The campaign to build the Friendship Campus near Baptist Hospital is about half way to completing its fundraising goal of \$10 million. "We do serve a lot of Gables children, and we have a lot of volunteers from the Gables schools," says Evensky. "It's a beautiful program."

