

# The philanthropist next door

By Richard Male

In the recent article, "Anschutz's \$23 million tops donors in Colorado," *Rocky* reporter Joanne Kelley listed the major givers in Colorado. She noted that while Denver financier Phil Anschutz gave \$23 million to charitable causes, Marvin Caruthers gave \$20 million and Tim Gill \$11 million, the "affluent, particularly those worth billions of dollars, give away far less than they can afford."

I have not found that beating people over the head is a particularly good motivational tactic. To me it is amazing that millionaires and billionaires give so much to philanthropic causes. Rather than focus on the philanthropic defects of the rich and famous, let's celebrate the fact that last year, Americans at every income level combined donated more than \$250 billion to our nation's 1.4 million non-profit organizations.

I believe that instead of decrying the philanthropists we have, Colorado can lead the way to a new spirit of philanthropy — one that includes the moviegoers as well as the opera patrons.

United Way of America started right here in Denver when, in 1887, several religious leaders had an idea that by coming together to raise money as a community, they could achieve more than with many separate appeals. Their unique "Denver Charity Organization," renamed The United Way, is one of the largest charitable fundraising

organization in the world.

The question, how can we make philanthropy the catalyst for change? I believe we must start by changing our definition of philanthropy.

Independent Sector's most recent study on giving and volunteering in the United States notes that "giving in Hispanic culture takes place primarily within the network of church, family and friends" rather than to institutional charities, accounting for the fact that, statistically, Latinos have lower levels of giving to organized philanthropy than the non-Latino population. It turns out that most Latino people

subscribe to the notion that charity really does begin at home — and at church, at school and in the neighborhood. Rather than send in a check to Food Bank of the Rockies, a Latino

philanthropist is more likely to stop by with a basket of food for a neighbor who has just lost his job.

Isn't the person who checks on his frail, elderly neighbor a philanthropist? The person who volunteers to coach soccer? The person living on a fixed income who writes a \$10 check? We can all be philanthropists, and we need to recognize and applaud the tremendous difference we are making.

Several leading philanthropic institutions are studying ways to tap into the informal but extremely generous network of individual philanthropists.

There is a lot that organized philanthropy can do to encourage individual philanthropists in Colorado. The Rose Community Foundation and El Pomar

Foundation already have programs that inspire and support high school students to raise and then give away money. The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County has developed a curriculum for elementary school children on the importance of giving back.

In December, Bixby School's student council had to make a tough choice between the Humane Society and Children's Hospital, but finally decided to donate \$1,000 of collected pennies to purchase an art cart for the new Children's Hospital. The foundation program so far has graduated 240 young philanthropists.

Our young people are ready and eager for leadership; each one of them is a budding philanthropist and change agent. The idea that Barack Obama is running a "movement" rather than a political campaign has come in for some sarcasm from the pundits, but we have seen more young people involved in this election than they have been in the past 50 years. In Colorado, schools and churches had lines winding round the block on caucus night. Sen. Obama has been able to touch a point deep inside people that brings hope and inspiration.

The philanthropists are ready and waiting. Will some more leaders please step forward?

---

*Richard Male has been involved in philanthropy for 35 years. He is an adjunct professor at Regis University and is a founder of the Colorado Non-profit Association and the Community Resource Center. His e-mail address is rich@richardmale.com*