

by Susan H. Bonnett

Making an Impact

Right: Gabe Zeringue, Raleigh Martin, Phoebe Martin and Olivia Kerth creating cards for troops overseas. Opposite page: Elizabeth Crain, Phoebe Martin and Ella Blossman volunteering at a Cards-4-Kids event.



PHOTOS COURTESY: NORTH-SHORE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

IF THE POINT OF MY ARTICLE is to backup the idea that Philanthropy = Power, I could literally just stop here. \$457 billion was given to charities in the United States in 2014 alone. That is the same dollar amount as the gross domestic product of Norway. The entire economy of Norway in 2014 was equal to the money that we, as generous Americans, gave away last year to love and serve our fellow man. It's easy to assume that

huge American corporations make up the bulk of that giving, but that is just not the case. In fact, last year, 74 percent of all charitable giving in the United States was done by individuals, and less than 1 percent was made up of Buffet- and Gates-sized mega gifts. So what does that mean in simple terms? It means that little ole you, little ole me, and a whole lot of others just like us make for a very powerful wave of goodness and generosity, one grain of sand at a time.



THE PAST

November is National Philanthropy Month. It has been since Ronald Reagan declared November 15 to be National Philanthropy Day in 1986, thus introducing the nation to the season >>

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Holly Rodgers moving boxes for the Grant's Gift Foundation.

photo courtesy: NORTHSORE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

of giving—the launch of the holiday season when we, as a nation, focus on thankfulness, peace and hope for the future. In reality, we also focus on buying, list making and material things. However, as we buy, buy, buy and check our lists, invariably we are pulled to give to things bigger than ourselves and our lives. Ringing bells outside of malls, angel trees at work, food baskets for families who cannot buy their own turkey all become part of our routine. And that is the part that feels so good and defines us as a people.

THE PRESENT

Interestingly, though November is National Philanthropy Month, December is traditionally the highest month in charitable giving. In 2014, almost \$40 billion was given away in December alone. Because, while it all holds true about the giving season and hope and joy, it is also the last month of the tax year, and turkey and mistletoe don't make us forget about "what we owe." Many families take this final month of the year as the opportunity to look at tax consequences and choose to give to charitable causes in a more generous fashion. Every year, the Northshore Community Foundation has been busier the final two weeks of the year than we

are at any other point. While we are a generous people, we are also a procrastinating bunch! But that is OK, because at the end of the day, we are moved to give generously and touch the lives of others, and that's really all that matters.

THE FUTURE

Our children are the future. Since we opened our doors, our foundation has found an incredible willingness of the youth in our community to give back and serve. They just need help figuring out how. So, we have started a program called Youth in Philanthropy to help guide the youngest of us in giving, volunteering and charitable engagement. Very simply, the program aims for purposeful action of our local youth in the hopes of inspiring them to plan, act and give for the common good of their "place," now and in the future. We know that everyone, regardless of age, has an innate desire and ability to give, to participate, to learn and to create the world they want to live in. Our local youth are incredibly motivated and need leaders to help them channel their energy, skills and knowledge into meaningful service that will build a better place for us all.

The Youth in Philanthropy program unites students who need or desire service hours with local nonprofits that are holding events or want general assistance. In joining, students can document their participation in YIP on their transcript as a service organization that is not affiliated with any one school, but rather, their entire community. YIP members volunteer to work only the events or causes that interest them and fit into their schedules. By making it easy and fun, here is what happens: As YIP members enthusiastically spread the word about works of the nonprofit sector to their peers, they become the thought-leaders in all things GIVING in this region within the youth community and build a knowledge base about philanthropy that will follow them throughout their lives.

FULL CIRCLE

Doing good works is great, but learning why it is so important is even better. It is important to realize that our active participation in volunteering and advocacy in our area makes our community stronger. By putting the needs of the common good above our own individual interests, even if it is just for an afternoon, we all learn the importance of civic virtue and that our contributions make a real impact in the place that we live.

So, yeah—\$457 billion. Whether it is donated during a certain month, for end-of-year tax benefits, to help educate your children on the power they possess to change the world or just because doing for others ALWAYS makes us feel better inside, keep up the generosity. And well done, you.

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