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Goodwill Hunting

by Daphne Nikolopoulos



Sig Bokalders

Philanthropy traditionally has been perceived as the domain of financially established men and women who, having enjoyed the fruits of their success, decide at a certain age to share the wealth.

That was the old paradigm. Today, privileged generations are using the wealth that is passed down to alter the face of philanthropy. These are not the fat-cat donors who write checks in order to secure the best seat at the ball or the opera. They are individuals who have the means — and the commitment — to effect change. The new generation of philanthropists is not afraid to tackle the tough issues, such as education, drugs and the environment. Sure, they write checks. But they also roll up their sleeves and get involved. They educate themselves on the issues and take an active interest in the organizations they support.

Their mantra: You can't solve a problem unless you experience it firsthand.

Palm Beach Illustrated talked to the younger members of two of the nation's most prominent and philanthropic families: the Roosevelts and the Johnsons. These individuals exemplify the shift in philanthropy from "throwing money at something" to putting in "sweat equity."

Nick Roosevelt likes to fish. The great-grandson of Franklin Delano Roosevelt has explored waters all over the world in pursuit of this passion. But recently, he noticed the pond was drying up. The dearth of fish in the sea was a wake-up call for the Wellington resident.

"You can't destroy all the things that need to be conserved in nature," Roosevelt says, noting that oceans worldwide are being overfished. "You're just going to run out."

Realizing man was "damaging the environment at an accelerated rate," Roosevelt sought a paradigm shift. He and his wife, Kelly — trustees of the Donner Foundation, a family foundation based in New York City and Toronto — took a long, hard look at how their philanthropic dollars were being spent.

"When William Donner created the foundation, the focus was cancer research and nuclear medicine," says Roosevelt, great-grandson of Donner. "My father's generation gave a lot to art and cultural pursuits, but times are changing, and now the foundation is getting more

diversified to reflect that.”

The Roosevelts’ manifesto has translated into support for organizations like Kid Sanctuary, a small Loxahatchee-based organization that works with foster children and abandoned children. The couple sponsored a grant of \$45,000 for the organization through the Donner Foundation.

“It’s a ramshackle facility,” Kelly Roosevelt says. “But they work with the children no one else wants and what they achieve is tremendous. We were impressed with their results.”



On the conservation side, the Roosevelts recently sponsored a grant of \$190,000 (\$100,000 from the New York foundation and \$90,000 through its Canadian arm) for the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation (RSCF), a wildlife research facility in Loxahatchee. The principal scientists study and protect endangered species and their habitats in conservation hot spots around the globe.

“Even though we give money to Conservation International, I feel so much more gratified giving to a group like Rare Species,” Nick Roosevelt says. “We know exactly where the money is going.”

Knowing where the money is going, and shepherding it to achieve the desired outcomes — in this case, the preservation of wildlife and lands that face demise due to human encroachment — is an important facet of the new philanthropy. The Roosevelts personally visit many of their grantee organizations, before and after sponsoring a grant. In November, they accompanied zoologist Paul Reillo, head of RSCF, to Dominica, West Indies, to observe parrot conservation programs.

Robert Wood “Woody” Johnson IV, CEO of the Johnson Company and a fourth-generation philanthropist, shares a similar approach to giving. “Just throwing money at something really doesn’t work anymore,” he says. “You have to put in sweat equity. You have to be in the trenches, willing to hammer and be hammered.”

Johnson, whose family launched biomedical giant Johnson & Johnson, is a trustee in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a \$10 billion megafoundation formed by his grandfather. He also heads his late father’s Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Charitable Trust. The former, he notes, is a huge, largely issue-driven philanthropic machine, while the smaller-scale charitable trust “supports activities that the trustees can make a difference in.”

Johnson’s personal interest is in biomedical research, particularly of autoimmune diseases like juvenile diabetes and lupus. His contributions to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation has led to “identifying new opportunities in treatment, prevention and cure” of the disease, including breakthroughs in cell transplantation and the development of less toxic immunosuppressive “cocktails.”

“We’re good fund-raisers, and we’re good operators,” he says. “You have to be both.”

His next project is substance abuse. “We continue to look at innovative ways to counteract

the personal, social and economic harm done by substance abuse," he says. "It's an elusive target. We know treatment is the best way to get people off drugs, but how do you do it effectively?"

One way, he believes, is by "branding" treatment centers with trusted, recognizable names — the same concept used by McDonald's and other easily identified franchises. "It's a complicated issue but we're not turning the other way; we're chipping away at it."

"We have to recognize that results aren't going to happen overnight," Roosevelt says. "Seeing the results of trying to save a species or impact the education system is a large undertaking. There are many question marks, and we're sometimes not making a dent in issues even with large amounts of support. All we can do as funders is invest in our interests, get personally involved, and stick with it."

That level of commitment is echoed by Johnson. "If you can make a difference through an unusual skill set or commitment you may have, your chances of success are much better [than by merely writing checks]. We're not doing this for fun, or for social reasons, or because we feel we have to because our fathers did it. We're doing it to accomplish something."

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