

GIFTS ENJOY ENDLESS REACH

[STATE Edition]

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Author: ELISABETH DYER

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A donation to the Community Foundation doesn't help a favorite charity just once: It gives forever.

The donor list reads like an ultimate A-list of Tampa society. Until you get to Jim Siglin.

"I'm just a poor little fellow," he said. "I live in a mobile home."

He laughs when asked if he thinks of himself as a philanthropist. Yet an impressive amount of Siglin's money - he won't say how much - is improving the community.

He doesn't go to big-ticket galas or fashion shows, but Siglin has enough money to give. He's among hundreds in Tampa who funnel cash to charities through the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, where donors start with a minimum of \$10,000. Siglin retired from the real estate business in New York state 17 years ago. When he and his wife, Doris, moved to the area, they had never heard of the foundation or its donor list until his accountant told him he could save by giving.

They wanted to help children. Other foundation donors give to the Florida Orchestra, area schools, blood banks, the zoo.

The foundation has a handle on various charities and community needs, so it's easier to put money there than to do the research on his own, Siglin says.

"This is a graduation," said David Fischer, president of the foundation and a former St. Petersburg mayor. "Most of our donors are older," he said. "As they put their toe in the water, they realize this is amazing."

There is more to the foundation than writing a one-time check to, say, the Humane Society.

It's a gift that keeps giving.

Donations to the foundation are invested. A portion of the return on those investments is then donated to charities of the donor's choice. The rest grows with the foundation for eternity, with the investment returns directed through the donor's wishes.

Community foundations started in Cleveland in 1914 and have since spread, with the first coming to Florida in the 1960s. Across the country, there are 700 today, 27 in Florida.

Tampa's foundation started in 1990. It has 425 donors and has distributed \$10-million to charities from its \$150-million in assets. Fischer envisions growing to a billion-dollar organization soon.

The foundation researches each of the 130 nonprofit organizations it supports.

It also responds to needs in the community. For example, after hearing of a shortage of principals at public schools due to retirements, the foundation began granting leadership training scholarships at Eckerd College. Almost 400 principals and assistant principals have attended.

Another grant pays for a public school counselor to track kids in foster care and help them once they become adults.

Siglin delivers hot lunches through Meals on Wheels once a week, so when he heard the organization was short on making its budget, he stepped up, making a donation in memory of Doris, his late wife.

His money also goes to a charter middle school on Hanna Avenue, the Carl Sagan Academy, which teaches impoverished kids.

It's Siglin's best bet at immortality. (He has no children.)

"I'm all alone. I don't care about a condo on the beach. I have food on my table. I have a car," he said.

"What else do I need?"

Elisabeth Dyer can be reached at edyer@sptimes.com or (813) 226- 3321.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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