

# Oregon is a laboratory of charitable giving

As 2016 approaches, our mailboxes are full of solicitations from nonprofits that range from small local organizations to national causes.

The largest organizations make a science of when and how to ask for money.



Steve Forrester

America has a giving culture that is unlike other countries.

Through involvement in two Astoria projects, I gained an education in fundraising. When construction of the Astoria Aquatic Center was completed, major needs remained. A group of us convened to raise money to cover those things. Rob Rudd, then development director of the Columbia River Maritime Museum, gave us an introductory course in how to ask for money.

In the campaign to restore the Liberty Theater, I relearned those lessons and discovered a few more.

If you raise money in Oregon, sooner or later you will run into the Oregon Community Foundation. While I was at *Willamette Week* in the 1970s, I met Ned Look, who was laying the groundwork for this new community foundation. Today it is America's seventh largest such foundation, with assets of \$1.5 billion. Most remarkably, the foundation is composed of funds established by 1,900 separate donors.

The foundation was one of the Liberty Theater's earliest donors.

Greg Chaille, who was OCF's president for 25 years, has written a book about Oregon philanthropy: *State of Giving*. Chaille and his collaborator Kristin Anderson capture the broad sweep of philanthropy in Oregon since 1980.

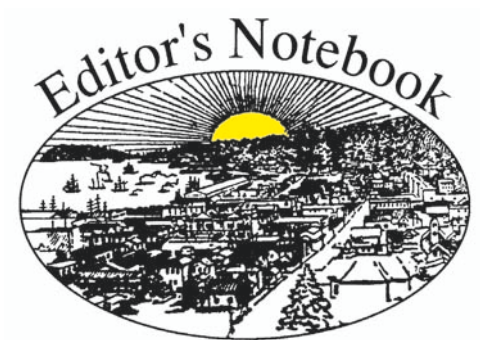
Chaille reports that, "Far from being the province of the rich and privileged, giving back to our communities is a social obligation we all share and can all, in our own ways, do." In a list released Dec. 8 by Diana Popa of wallethub.com, Oregon ranked fourth among the most charitable states. Washington ranked eighth.

One of the most creative philanthropic efforts in Oregon is the Chalkboard Project. This educational research, innovation and advocacy group is composed of six foundations including Oregon Community Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, the Ford Family Foundation and three others.

The Tillamook School District has been one of Chalkboard's prime proving grounds. At a time when education desperately needs innovation, Chalkboard is a bright light.

The late Thomas Vaughan was one of Oregon's most prodigious fundraisers in the postwar years up to 1980. Vaughan created the modern Oregon Historical Society. When I spoke to him for my *Willamette Week* article on Portland philanthropy, Vaughan was surprisingly disparaging of the level of local giving.

What Oregon notably lacks are corporate powerhouses. That becomes apparent in the performing arts. While Seattle has a stunning concert hall, the Benaroya, and a modern venue for Seattle Opera, Portland has nothing like either. But Seattle has wealth generated by Boeing, Microsoft, Weyerhaeuser, Amazon and Starbucks. Oregon has Nike, and its founder Phil



Knight has been exceedingly generous to the University of Oregon and Oregon Health and Science University.

The most interesting research into philanthropy is about its physiological effects. *The Wall Street Journal* on Monday noted studies which show that "giving to others reduces stress and strengthens the immune system."

*The Journal* reported a study by Baris Yoruk at the University of Albany, State University of New York. Yoruk sought to link the tax subsidy for charitable giving with personal health. Yoruk found that, "a 1 percent increase in a tax subsidy for charitable giving is associated with a 0.1 percent increase in the health index."

Another way of looking at this is what Chief Seattle famously said: More important than what we have is what we give away.

—S.A.F.



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