

## The New Green Philanthropy

*As environmentalism goes mainstream, a new generation of donors has gotten more creative and high-profile in their giving. Community foundations offer an ideal venue for donors who want to use their gifts to advocate for environmental change.*

The stats are impressive: 20 runners, 16 countries, 15,200 miles, 95 days. This summer, the Blue Planet Run, the vision of Northern California industrialist Jin Zidell, will raise awareness and money for a cause most of us take for granted: clean drinking water.

But the number that drives Zidell is this one: 2.2 million people die each year from drinking water that's unsafe.

"One of the reasons I turned to the environmental movement is that the nonhuman part of the environment had no voice," says Zidell, who funnels 50 percent of his net worth into philanthropy, largely through a donor advised fund at the Marin Community Foundation. "I thought that's where I should put my time and effort – to helping those who had no voice."

Philanthropic efforts by environmentally-minded donors are on the rise. They're also becoming more creative and high-profile. Zidell, for example, scored a huge win when Dow Chemical Co. agreed to sponsor the Blue Planet Run. He has also outlined his concerns about the world's drinking water at a briefing at the United Nations.

### **Baby Boomer Ideals**

What has caused the surge in green philanthropy?

In part, it's being triggered by baby boomer donors, who are especially environmentally sensitive, according to financial planner Randy Fox, founder of the International Association of Advisors in Philanthropy.

"This hands-on philanthropic movement is emerging in much bigger numbers than I've ever seen before. These are people who don't want to go to the big institutions like the symphony or the art museum as much as they want to do something at the grassroots level," he adds. "These grassroots, individual philanthropists are much more interested in seeing a truer impact from their financial dollars – and a lot of that is related to the environment. A lot of them are also finding that a donor advised fund at a community foundation is the perfect way to get it done."

### **Advocacy Grows**

It's no coincidence that Zidell hooked up with the Marin Community Foundation, long known for the environmental interests of its donor base.

As Alexandra Derby, the foundation's director of donor services, explains: "Generally speaking, our donors feel it's very much a priority and a responsibility to not only represent their green interests in their daily lives and in their grassroots efforts, but also through their funding. We also have to remember that advocacy is a major part of philanthropy. Certainly, on the national stage, advocacy around environmental issues is higher than it's ever been."

### **Advisors Play a Crucial Role**

Notably, the Marin Community Foundation relies almost exclusively on referrals from professional advisors.

"They are our entry point. We view them as critically important," Derby notes. "Many donors today view their advisor as their first link of trust. Once the donor is confident about all other aspects of their financial planning, they'll begin to consider charitable intent. At that point, the advisor may suggest a donor advised fund as a component of a client's overall financial planning."

### **Benefits of Working with Community Foundations**

In addition to the professional expertise the advisor brings to the table, there is another benefit: providing client access to like-minded donors and nonprofit players.

Zidell, for instance, was able to leverage his relationship with the Marin Community Foundation in helping set up his own nonprofit to support the Blue Planet Run. The foundation not only helped him create a nonprofit structure but assisted in developing a fundraising plan, getting grants and raising public awareness. It also introduced him to other donors interested in the same issue.

The Marin Community Foundation's donors are already making an impact. On a large scale, there's Zidell, whose donor advised fund helps support the Blue Planet Run Foundation. Other donors fund Marin Agricultural Land Trust, working to keep land in agriculture. A couple of focused environmental projects include providing "poop" bags for dog walkers on Marin County trails and encouraging school kids to use old-fashioned lunch boxes instead of disposable bags. At the moment, the foundation is in the process of creating a campaign to reduce the environmental footprint of Marin County's citizens. The project includes the development of a school curriculum, which will launch next year.

### **Leverage the "Multiplier Effect"**

The key to successful funding is what Derby calls the "multiplier effect." A community foundation, she says, not only leverages money but advocacy, publicity and educational opportunities. "The philanthropic conversation between advisor and client isn't just about philanthropic giving," Derby says. "It's about inheritance, outright gifts, how the client thinks about the impact they may want to have."

“Working with a community foundation is the essence of that multiplier effect. In our daily lives, we’re all very busy. Working with a community foundation is like opening the door to a whole world of people who are making it their business to leave this world a better place.”

*Ellen Uzelac is a freelance writer based in Chestertown, Maryland. Copyright 2007, Council on Foundations. Used with permission.*