



The Art of Becoming Informed Donors

PHIL AND MARY LU MCPHERON DONOR ADVISORS AND VOLUNTEERS

For Phil and Mary Lu McPheron, philanthropy is a family affair.

When more than 30 requests for funding were made to the Community Foundation of Tompkins County in November, the McPherons consulted with their daughters — both of whom now live in the Washington, D.C. area — to determine if and where they should donate.

After assessing the requests and asking for more information, they all chose a nonprofit they had never heard of — the [Free Science Workshop](#), which was launching a science night for families in Ithaca that would include a nutritious meal and an interactive science project.

“The kids and parents could attend a workshop and build something, which would promote interaction in the family,” says Phil, a retired administrator at Cornell University and a board member at Community Foundation. “And it was particularly devoted to kids who might not have the resources to do that.”

The McPherons were able to help meet the funding request of the Free Science Workshop largely because of the donor-advised fund they created at Community Foundation in 2017. Their fund, one of 64 such funds at Community Foundation, allows donors to contribute money and distribute it over time to causes they choose.

Their Community Foundation donor advised fund enables them to be more actively engaged in grant making because it gives them direct access to needs.

“We are informed by the Community Foundation of requests *in* as well as *out* of cycle, and we can pick and choose what we want to fund,” says Mary Lu, a retired senior extension associate at Cornell who is a committee member for the Children and Youth Fund at the Community Foundation.

Both Phil and Mary Lu were influenced by the charitable giving of their mothers when they were growing up in Northern New Jersey. Throughout each year, their mothers would write checks to charitable organizations, including their churches.

Phil, however, wanted to broaden that model into philanthropic giving and creating change, which is a more wholistic approach toward supporting communities. **“We ask ourselves, “How can we help as**



donors to strengthen our community by promoting people, organizations and resources while making our efforts more coherent and effective?" he says.

Creating connections to nonprofit organizations that need help in Tompkins County is one of the advantages Community Foundation provides to donors, says Amy LeViere, philanthropic services officer for Community Foundation.

"We hear over and over again how much donors value the connections they make through Community Foundation," LeViere says. **"As a catalyst, we often provide the space and the connections sparking the fire of philanthropy."**

By establishing the McPheron Family Fund, the couple created a vehicle in which their two daughters could engage in philanthropy in the community where they were raised in addition to aiding charitable efforts in the United States and around the world. Their daughters — Heather, a health program and policy manager for L&M Consulting, and Alicia, a hospitality banquet manager at a Marriott Renaissance Hotel — were encouraged by their parents to save a portion of their allowance for charity when they were attending Northeast Elementary School.

"We said, **'We want you to save 10 percent of your allowance to give to charitable efforts,'**" Mary Lu says. **"By starting early, we modeled a legacy that we thought was important."**

Before becoming involved in Community Foundation five years ago, Phil was a member of the board of United Way of Tompkins County and Mary Lu was a member of the board of Family and Children's Services.

Through Community Foundation, they have made gifts to support the Community Foundation's operations, the discretionary [Tompkins Today and Tomorrow Fund](#), and other nonprofits such as The History Center, and Finger Lakes Land Trust. They also donate to national organizations such as Americans for Responsible Solutions, the organization that supports gun control, founded by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and her husband, Mark Kelly.

Other interests have included promoting environmental, wildlife, and conservation efforts, supporting education, leadership, and civic responsibility at all age levels, alleviating hunger and housing problems, funding the arts and humanities, and helping provide micro loans to women in impoverished areas.

"We spread our giving because we have diverse interests and see so many diverse needs," Phil says. "One can make an argument that you would have more of an impact if you pull your money together and put it all in one place. **But it feels better to us to know that we're supporting many efforts.** We want to help with the problem of food insecurity so we do so through the Food Bank of the Southern Tier and Loaves and Fishes. **We're correlating our interests with where we see we can have an impact and make a difference."**

For more information on giving opportunities, please contact Nancy Massicci, Chief Development Officer, nmassicci@cftompkins.org or 607-272-9333, ext. 205