



**GENEROSITY  
IS EPIDEMIC IN  
MOUNTAIN TOWNS**

*words by* SABINA DANA-PLASSE

# what gives

**Park City, Sun Valley, and Jackson Hole are not only premier resort destinations, they are also extremely generous communities. From feeding the food insecure to ensuring art programs thrive, giving and doing good are contagious in these mountain towns.**

Is mountain town philanthropy any different than anywhere else? Well, to answer that question, it depends on what philanthropy means to an individual and to a community. When living in remote and expansive mountain regions where the populations rarely reach beyond 30,000 people, philanthropy is not just a check-writing experience. And one thing is for sure, in most of these communities, you can't get through your day without benefiting from the generosity of time, treasure, and talents in a mountain town.

As Executive Director Katie Wright of the Park City Community Foundation in Park City, Utah, says, "What is your day like? Do you wake up and take care of your adopted dog or cat, take a run on a trail maintained by volunteers, listen to commercial-free radio, ride a free bus? Before you even make it to your office or job, three to four non-profits have been involved in your life."

Wright could not paint a clearer picture about what non-profits do and how they serve mountain town communities. From live

music at free community concerts to food banks for the food insecure, non-profits work everywhere and on all levels of life to sustain a well-rounded and healthy community. And our mountain communities are getting creative in their fundraising models. Gaining popularity around the West are "giving days" where in a 24-hour period anyone can give online and earmark their donation to a charity of their choice. From Steamboat Springs, Colorado, to Sun Valley, Idaho, a day to give to your favorite non-profit has been embraced



by community members at various levels of giving.

"In Park City, the Park City Community Foundation hosts Live PC Give PC, a 24-hour event that has raised over \$1.7 million in the past three years," Wright reveals. "It's \$10 minimum and the entire community is involved. On the giving day, everyone wears orange t-shirts, gathers in town, and promotes a day of giving." Not only does the event raise much-needed funds, it also raises awareness about the various non-profits and the work they do within that community.

Jackson Hole is another very generous and philanthropic mountain community. One of the most popular events celebrates giving with a fun run. The Community Foundation of Jackson Hole's annual Old Bill's Run is a unique fundraising event started by an anonymous couple known as Mr. and Mrs. Old Bill, whose vision was to expand charitable donations in Jackson Hole by encouraging the entire community to participate.

Over the past 17 years, Old Bill's Run has helped Jackson Hole-area charities raise over \$100 million. In 2013, the event raised \$9,809,404, bringing the lifetime total funds raised up to \$100 million. The total amount distributed in 2013 through Old Bill's Fun Run represents contributions from 3,139 donors. Designated gifts of \$7,235,134 were matched by \$2,574,270 from Mr. and Mrs. Old Bill, co-challengers, and friends of the match. The resulting match percentage totaled 55 percent, enhancing the impact of every Old Bill's gift, which goes to housing homeless pets, feeding the hungry, teaching children,

and protecting Jackson Hole's natural beauty, just to name a few recipients of this largesse.

"How often can you raise \$9.8 million without having to put on a tuxedo?" asks Community Foundation of Jackson Hole's President Katharine Conover. "It's wonderful to be able to attend a fundraiser where everyone feels like a philanthropist. You can bring your kids and your dog. It's a good-spirited competition, which is always embraced by this community, and it's a chance to see friends and neighbors."

In the Sun Valley area, where over 100 non-profits exist ranging from festivals to a no-kill animal shelter and a food bank, sometimes resources need to be raised quickly and that's where giving circles can help supplement non-profits' strained budgets.

The Wood River Women's Charitable Foundation started as a giving circle of \$1,000 from each member. Beginning with 52 women who wanted to give to community entities that needed financial assistance, today the Foundation peaks at over 250 members with year-round social and educational events for members and guests as well as an exciting grant presentation day.

"We're very conscious of community needs," explains Marcia Liebich, a Wood River Women's Charitable Foundation founder and Emeritus board member. "In a small community, it's possible to be closer to its needs and more informed."

The Wood River Women's Charitable Foundation's president Jan DeBard says that more than half of the members are part-time residents, but the organization

is unique because its members are intimately aware of the Wood River Valley's needs. "These women are attached to the community," tells DeBard. "They don't feel anonymous and the foundation has inspired more philanthropy around the Wood River Valley community with more giving circles that have lower monetary commitments." In these small mountain towns, giving inspires giving.

When Wood River Valley resident and landscape architect Marty Lyon collaborated with his son to start a company based in the Wood River Valley and Washington state, the two agreed they wanted Lyon Landscape Architects to embrace community outreach, so Lyon started a men's giving circle, 100 Men Who Care in the Wood River Valley. Meeting for one hour every quarter, these men come together with their donations and decide where to donate. And their donations come as a surprise to those organizations chosen because they don't know they've been picked.

"I started 100 Men Who Care because I could not join any of the women's groups who do charitable donations," says Lyon. "In the Wood River Valley community, the majority of the philanthropic organizations

are run by women. I saw this as an opportunity." So he structured 100 Men Who Care to make sure 100 men meet each quarter and each member donates \$100 a quarter or \$400 a year. At each meeting, the men who attend pick organizations and these unsolicited donations make a difference.

"Communities are strengthened by philanthropy," says Lyon. "With our group, it's a direct donation that's unexpected. So far this year we've donated \$1,600 to Ketchum Community Dinners, \$1,800 to National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI), and most recently \$2,200 to Wood River Fire and Rescue." Is 100 Men Who Care at full capacity? "We are open to more men joining. I've been told," says Lyon, "we're just missing beer and a remote."

To instill this philanthropic sense of purpose in future generations in Sun Valley, Morley Golden created WOW-Students, an organization built on the idea that generosity builds stronger communities. WOW partners with non-profits to create generosity experiences for all classrooms in the Wood River Valley. "A class will take a project that a non-profit sponsors and work it into the classroom curriculum," explains Golden. "The non-profits are

pro-active for us."

After two years, 4,000 students have been engaged with the WOW program, which is 65 percent of Blaine County K-12 students. "It's not about the money—it's the experience," says Golden. "We provide \$25 per student so that every student has the chance to make a project happen and give back to the community. The most important thing is creating the experience."

Community Foundation of Jackson Hole's Conover points out that in urban areas, especially in major cities, philanthropy can often be about securing a social status whereas in mountain towns, it's just what needs to be done, and it's just what people do.

"It's in the water," says Conover. "The most amazing part about Old Bill's is when children come into my office with piggy banks and empty them on my desk and say who they want to support. They have causes they care about—animal adoption and skating club have to get funded. Some day these kids who have been raised in Jackson Hole will go out into the world and spread this view of philanthropy."

When we think about the things that connect people who have chosen to make a

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— Katharine Conover, President, Community Foundation of Jackson Hole



ABOVE (CLOCKWISE): Live PC Give PC in Park City, Utah, is a one-day giving event that has been embraced by the community. Sun Valley's Wood River Women's Charitable Foundation is 250 members strong. Old Bill's Run in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, has raised over \$100 million in 17 years for local non-profits doing important work.

### FOR MORE INFO ON THESE ORGANIZATIONS

**PARK CITY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**  
[theparkcityfoundation.org](http://theparkcityfoundation.org)

**COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF JACKSON HOLE**  
[cfjacksonhole.org](http://cfjacksonhole.org)

**WOOD RIVER WOMEN'S CHARITABLE FOUNDATION**  
[wwwcf.org](http://wwwcf.org)

**100 MEN WHO CARE**  
[lyonla.com/social-consciousness/](http://lyonla.com/social-consciousness/)

**WOW-STUDENTS, WOOD RIVER FOUNDATION**  
[wow-students.org](http://wow-students.org)

**BOULDER MOUNTAIN CLAYWORKS**  
[bouldermtnclay.com](http://bouldermtnclay.com)

**BLAINE COUNTY HUNGER COALITION**  
[thehungercoalition.org](http://thehungercoalition.org)

mountain community their home, we see that it's much more than a love of skiing or outdoor recreation that we have in common. Generosity—seeing a need and filling it—is an essential part of the social fabric of many mountain communities. And some organizations get very creative about the ways they support non-profits, especially artist-based organizations.

In Sun Valley, the Boulder Mountain Clayworks Empty Bowl project invites community members to make bowls in support of the Blaine County Hunger Coalition. For most, it's hard to believe that resort communities are plagued by food insecurity and Boulder Mountain Clayworks brings awareness to those in need.

The bowl-a-thon creates

as many as 300 bowls, which are sold for \$20 each. The young and the young-at-heart share in the fun of making these bowls, a symbol of sustenance. Many times people have never worked with clay and this project introduces them to a new experience. "It started with the Idaho Food Bank and the bowls were delivered to Boise," says Boulder Mountain Clayworks director Susan Ward. "But the need to take care of people in our own community arose, and it became a local philanthropy project." The bowls are then sold at the Empty Bowls event in January at the Presbyterian Church in Ketchum where the public is invited to purchase and fill a bowl with soup, salad, or other treats, which are all donated from community restaurants.

The Hunger Coalition is an organization supported by many in the area, including the area's schools. Each fall The Sage School, an independent school just 15 miles south of the resort, works with their neighbors to collect food for the Coalition. People from a number of the school's surrounding neighborhoods donate items to help the Coalition supply food to those in need.

So many of the philanthropic programs in our mountain towns began as grass-roots solutions to real needs and the spirit of collaboration and support is as strong as the spirit of giving. "Solutions are accessible in small towns," says Park City Community Foundation's Wright. "In a crisis, we're there to care."