

VOICES OF GIVING

'Keep the money moving': Why the state's biggest philanthropists give back

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Put together a list of the most well-known philanthropists in Greater Boston, and Bill Cummings, Sandra Edgerley and Jack Connors are among those at the top. They are giving away millions of dollars of their own money for nonprofit causes, plus raising money and shepherding invaluable grants to nonprofits in the region. The Business Journal recently asked each of them about their philanthropy work and the industry as a whole. The following are some of the highlights from those interviews:

BILL CUMMINGS *is founder of Cummings Properties and author of "Starting Small and Making It Big: An Entrepreneur's Journey to Billion-Dollar Philanthropist." Bill and his wife, Joyce, became the first in Massachusetts to sign the Giving Pledge, a promise established by fellow billionaires [Warren Buffet](#) and [Bill and Melinda Gates](#) to encourage the super-rich to share their wealth.*

What does it mean to you to be able to give back and support so many community causes?

Some people start off in junior high school and high school and play sports and they want to be big-league ballplayers and play in the World Series. Or they're great tennis players and want to play at Wimbledon someday. I never did that. I thought I would do something different, and I always wanted to be in business, and I always wanted to do well in business. I never really thought about any kind of giving of the scale that we're doing now, because I never imagined that I'd ever be that successful. We just never planned on it, and I never expected to have that ability. But when it came along and we started doing things that were meaningful in the community in one way or another, I saw the differences we could make. It was extraordinarily rewarding for Joyce and me. It's very humbling.



W. MARC BERNSAU

"I think we all, no matter where we are at, have an obligation to try to be helpful," said Bill Cummings, founder of Cummings Properties.

Do you think other high-net-worth individuals have an obligation to give back, and, if so, how much of their own money should they give? I think we all, no matter where we are at, have an obligation to try to be helpful. There's so many different ways that we can all be helpful, and I include those of us who have done well. I mean, what else are we going to do with our money? Right? So I do think it's important to keep that money moving to improve things. Keep the money moving. There's people like Warren Buffett who are so much more capable than anybody we know. He is one of the people I think of as a personal hero of mine. He's certainly doing the right thing in encouraging more people to do the Giving Pledge.

SANDRA "SANDY" EDGERLEY *is chairwoman of The Boston Foundation, a community foundation focused on investing resources in impact areas including education, health, jobs, housing and the arts in Greater Boston. This is her ninth year on the foundation's board and her third year as chair.*

How has philanthropy changed since your involvement? I think one of the things I've noticed is that, both for individuals and for companies, there is a real desire to get engaged and become educated on the issues facing our communities — and also educated on the solutions that are actually working. There's much more of a hands-on approach to philanthropy now. In the old days, right after college, there was much more of a corporate effort. There would often be corporate campaigns, which really made a big difference. But I think today you see less of that. There's much more of an actual tackling of an issue, and what I mean by that is partnering with a nonprofit on a particular issue of engagement.

Also, I think Boston is such a hub of innovation, and I think that's true of the nonprofit arena as well, with so many world-class nonprofits actually started here in Boston. And more of them are making an impact nationally. Our innovation economy is trickling into the nonprofit arena here because there are so many people with great ideas who see a problem and want to address it and make things better.

How do you think Boston is doing in philanthropic work, and in helping to create opportunity in the city and region? I think we're doing very well, but we have a long way to go. I'm very proud of the progress that we've made. One of the pleasures of being part of The Boston Foundation is that there is so much data available and a lot of that research brings data to bear to look at issues in our communities and helps us track progress in those areas. But I think progress has been really compelling and lot of the ideas that we as a community have put into place are really paying off. But there is so much more to go. I don't ever want us to feel like we're finished. The goal of making Boston an opportunity for all is still one out there that we still haven't fully achieved. I'm thinking of some of the programs The Boston Foundation has put into place, like the Pledge 1 Percent, which was put into place a couple of years ago to try and tap into companies locally and particularly tech and life sciences, some of the newer companies in the economy, now getting involved and pledging to give 1 percent of their future value to help future philanthropy. We already have 70 members, so I think the response is really exciting. That, to me, gives a lot of hope for the future. We've created a lot of new partnerships with

companies in the innovation industry that want to get involved. There's a lot of interest in making a difference and lot of progress being made.

JACK CONNORS Jr. *is co-founder and chair of Hill Holiday & Camp Harbor View. The former advertising executive is one of Boston's most well known and successful philanthropists, having singlehandedly raised hundreds of millions of dollars for a wide assortment of nonprofit causes in the state, including the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center; his alma mater, Boston College; and Camp Harbor View, a nonprofit he helped start that has served underserved youth from Boston for 11 years.*

How has fundraising changed since you started in philanthropy, and how is Boston doing when it comes to philanthropy? When I started in advertising there was an adage I'm sure you've heard, what they call the 80-20 rule, and it was so ubiquitous. They said that 20 percent of the donors give 80 percent of the money. Today, that's no longer the case. The new adage is 2 percent of the donors give 95 percent of the money. Goodbye, middle class. A lot of our money comes from wealthy people and comes from corporate Boston and it comes from foundations. ... We're a very philanthropic society. People generally want to help people. But now they want to know where their money is going. They want to have a feel of it more, at little more proximity to where the dough goes.

How do we get more people involved in philanthropy and not just some of the wealthiest? It's called 'by example,' or 'deeds' not 'worth.' Just show them what you're doing. ... There are a lot of people who made a fortune in this town, and I am one of them. Philanthropy has become my new career, a chapter in my life. So I have that reputation now. But for all the reputations one could have, it's not too bad, right?

I think if I were to change anything, I would suggest that the future belongs to the young, and we need to get more folks from the younger generation into senior positions. I talk to people my age — and I'm talking about those who are 55 to 85 years old, that demographic, those who are also wealthy. Because of their life experiences, they have already identified the 10 things they want to contribute to. I'm trying to be No. 11. The younger generation has identified one, maybe two, things they want to contribute to. But as the families get a little more success under their belt, it would be nice if they wanted to give to what's important to them and my generation. There's only so much time to give money away. I mean, how much time do I got? Now you understand why we need to get more young people involved in all this, and plant the seeds. They are the future, not me and not the folks my age.

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