



Photo courtesy of Gloria Duffy

Who Will Step Up?

Dr. Gloria C. Duffy

President and C.E.O.

It's been a sad procession, these past few years, with the passing of so many of our region's most community oriented and generous leaders. I have found

myself attending too many memorial services, giving too many eulogies for departed friends and mentors. And the question left behind in their wake is: Who will step up to fill their roles not only as philanthropists but as leaders ready to take up a good cause, and lead a good fight, in the public interest?

Last year we lost Bill and Mel Lane, the brothers who owned *Sunset* magazine for many decades. The Lanes were generous donors to Stanford University, the California State Parks Foundation and many other causes. Mel was the first chair of the California Coastal Commission, while Bill was the first Mayor of Portola Valley.

And then we mourned Walter Shorenstein, real estate mogul, creator of the Shorenstein Center on Asia Pacific Affairs at Stanford and the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard, and Democratic political power broker. We lost Richard Goldman, creator of the Goldman Environmental Prize and the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley and donor to many community and environmental organizations. And Bill Coblentz, a San Francisco attorney often at the nexus of good causes, recently died as well.

Most recently, Warren Hellman passed away. Descendent of Isaias Hellman, the first major financier in California and first president of Wells Fargo Bank, Warren led efforts to improve Golden Gate Park, started the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival, and created and funded Bay Citizen, the new, non-profit news service in San Francisco.

In the previous decade, among those we lost was Sally Lilienthal, who supported SF MOMA and founded Ploughshares Fund, a unique, San Francisco-based foundation that supports efforts to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons. And we mourned Jim and Ann Compton, the twins whose grandparents founded Ralston Purina and who for six decades were generous donors to causes near and far, through the Compton Foundation. These individuals paralleled the work of Walter Hewlett and David Packard in large-scale philanthropy, which has both supported existing community organizations and often created new and needed institutions here in the Bay Area.

There is a saying in the Bay Area that if you want to get something done, whether it is rebuilding the Stanford Quad in the wake of the Loma Prieta earthquake or building a new symphony hall, you call a certain group of people to a meeting, and among those in the room you will be able to raise the funds needed and enlist the political wherewithal to get any project done. We know who was in this room in the past – the folks like Bill Lane and Dick Goldman and Warren Hellman. They got things done in our region, often generously opening their own pockets.

Who will be in this mythical room in the future?

Warren Hellman's sister Nancy Bechtle, George and Charlotte Shultz, members of the Haas and Fisher families and Google's CEO Eric Schmidt continue to be among those who would be in any room where good things are planned and accomplished for the community.

But there is still a sense that as the older lions and lionesses of philanthropy and leadership pass away, their like will not be seen again in the Bay Area. Their leadership and financial commitment have helped to make the Bay Area a very special place, a mecca of care for the environment and human well-being and a cradle of creativity from business to the

arts. They embodied the phrase Warren Hellman often used, "you give where you live." So who will inherit their mantle, and be ready to answer the phone, call their friends and write checks, when need arises or a worthy project needs help?

As new wealth replaces old wealth, the requirements of leadership fall on those with new wealth. Much of this new financial capacity is in Silicon Valley. We certainly have generous individuals in the next generation coming along in the Bay Area. One example is Jeff Skoll, the first president of EBay, who has created a Palo Alto foundation that funds social entrepreneurship. The Skoll Foundation's president, Sally Osberg, is one of those who is in the room when there is talk of making good things happen in the Bay Area, as are the presidents of the Irvine, Packard, and Hewlett foundations.

But professional foundation leaders alone cannot match the need that exists in the Bay Area for individuals with the combination of wealth, political power and community influence that can get things done.

Who will step up? Look around, look in the mirror, and be mindful that this is a question on which the future of our region profoundly depends. 🐾

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