

Philanthropy Corner – 5-22-11

“Gib Peters Left More Than His Inspirational Writings”

Dianna L. Sutton

“I’ve met a new challenge and created a solution ...” is a quote made by Gib Peters in his recently released book, “Gib’s Odyssey,” which was reviewed in last week’s Solares Hill. This statement in reference to his voyage and fight with Lou Gehrig’s Disease (ALS) and motivation to teach others about persevering through challenges with his book could have easily referred to the philanthropic legacy he left in this community.

Gib Peters was a founder of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys (CFFK). In fact, it was Gib who inspired the idea. As the trust officer of a local bank, Gib was consulting with Ray Baker on his estate plan and told him, “It’s really too bad we don’t have a community foundation. That would be the ideal vehicle to serve your goals.” Ray, a retired advertising executive and music aficionado who wanted to ensure future bequests to a few of his favorite charities, responded to Gib, “Let’s get one!”

According to the historical account of CFFK by Ray Baker, creating a community foundation in the Florida Keys in 1996 was truly an act of audacity. At that time, experts said Key West and the Florida Keys lacked the critical mass of population to support a community foundation. Plus, there wasn’t a tradition of planned giving to charities other than to the faith community and a few civic organizations. But it was reasoned there was surely enough wealth and caring individuals in the community to support such an initiative. Thus, Gib and other community philanthropists and leaders who were familiar with the community foundation concept seized the moment to give birth to the creation of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys. From there, permanent leadership was identified and recruited to take on the challenge of creating a community resource that would inspire and build philanthropic resources to support our community into perpetuity.

During the early formative years, Gib continued to be involved with CFFK and wrote articles for the newspaper to educate people on philanthropic tools to maximize their ability to leave assets to the community through their estate plans. After his diagnosis with ALS, CFFK, allying itself with friends of Gib’s, held a cocktail party to invite support for a new ALS research fund at CFFK. More than a hundred well-wishers gathered to pay affectionate tribute to this courageous man and generated more than \$15,000 in contributions to the new fund which was subsequently granted in Gib’s honor to medical research. Upon his death in 2005, friends again rallied to create the Gib Peters Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society Acquisition Endowment because of his long-time involvement with the museum. Grants from this fund will be used to acquire items for the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society collection, including the costs associated with the conservation, storage, study and exhibition of the acquired items.

Like George Fontana who wrote the review of Gib’s book, I never knew Gib. But then, I never knew Marion Stevens, Richard Cassedy, Bob and Martha Sauer, Scotti Merrill, Clifford Grink, Jeff MacNelly, and many others who have left philanthropic gifts to the community through their estates or efforts of their friends and families. But I do know their stories because CFFK has been entrusted to carry on their legacy by granting scholarships or supporting other community activities that had meaning to them during their lifetime here in the Keys. Perhaps they were inspired by Gib’s articles on philanthropic giving, but they definitely were affected by his inspiration to create a community foundation.

Today, CFFK is one of nearly 700 community foundations in the United States with more than \$31 billion in charitable funds that serves thousands of people who share the common interest of improving the quality of life in their communities. Here in the Keys, more than 1,000 people have contributed to CFFK which has resulted in more than \$15 million in grants that helped people restore their lives after Hurricane Wilma and has provided support to hundreds of local charitable organizations and activities in our local community. Gib's legacy is not just about the last voyage he writes about in his book, but also the legacy he left while working with others who had the vision, passion and commitment to create a philanthropic vehicle for people to turn challenges into opportunities in order to give to the community they love.

*Dianna Sutton is a national certified fundraising executive with more than twenty years of fundraising and nonprofit management. She is currently the President and CEO of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys. She can be contacted at [dsutton@cffk.org](mailto:dsutton@cffk.org).*