

Nonprofit Profile

PHILANTHROPIC VENTURES FOUNDATION

BILL SOMERVILLE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HQ: Oakland.

Mission: Pushing the envelope of philanthropy. We're trying to do things no one else is doing. For example, all our grantmaking is done in 24 hours. We specialize in critical interventions funding — philanthropy should not be passive.

Founded: 1990.

Milestone: I'm the first person in 25 years in Northern California to start a foundation without my own money.

Annual giving: \$5 million.

Corporate support: We work with some large foundations. Packard uses us to do grassroots funding because they're not geared for that sort of thing.

Corporate supporters: Robert Hall, Thomas Long Foundation.

Board chair: John Carver.

Board members: Seven, including Jackie Speier and William Green.

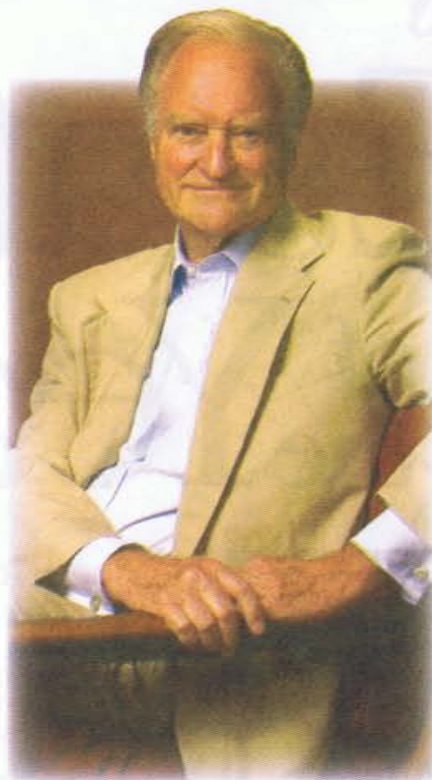
Employees: Three.

Volunteers: We have advisers who offer help and expertise.

Events: We will have an event announcing my book in February at the St. Francis Center in Redwood City.

Telephone: (510) 645-1890.

Web site: www.venturesfoundation.org



Office issues

Recent challenge: Constantly looking for outstanding people. Another thing is how to change the thinking patterns of kids in trouble; that is what I'm working on right now. The lowest common

denominator amongst them tends to prevail. It's not that they all should go to college, but they should all achieve and understand it's 'cool,' if you will.

Measures of success: You see whether things get better. Another is watching programs come to life, like ours with juvenile judges where they can fax us and we will get them a check, like for a jacket or dental care for a child, in 48 hours. We give money quickly when it is needed.

Smartest move: Marrying my high school sweetheart.

Missed opportunity: I didn't finish my doctorate at Cal in criminology. At the time it didn't seem that important.

Misconception: People say, 'Heck, Bill, I could do your job. Anyone can give money away.' The truth is we don't give money away. There is a sophistication to philanthropy; it isn't just doling out money.

Professional insights

Personal path to nonprofit work: I left the family printing business in 1960 to work in race relations. I went to foundations for 14 years to ask for funds. When I had the opportunity to run a foundation (Somerville was the first executive director of Peninsula Community Foundation), I promised I'd never treat people the way I was treated. Modesty is an important element in this work.

Toughest aspect: Original thinking. Coming up with ideas to meet social problems.

Most surprising aspect: How dedicated and passionate the program people are that I work with. It's just amazing.

There's Larry Purcell, an ex-priest who grew up in San Francisco. I worked with him four years before I realized he didn't take a salary.

Biggest pain: People who want to be rescued. You don't rescue people in this business; you work with people who have pride and capability. If you rescue people, it's giving without momentum; if you rescue them today, they'll be back tomorrow to be rescued again.

Greatest pleasure: Working with committed people. They are inspirational.

Introspections

Best recent moment: My book coming out at Heyday press, it's really nice to be able to talk about what's been going on and what you've found works and think may be able to improve the field of philanthropy.

Worst recent moment: I've gotten back into woodworking. I was lugging some lumber that was too heavy and it racked my back up.

Dream for another life: The ability to exercise and practice philanthropy to an extent I never thought possible.

Greatest inspiration: One of them was Ruth Chance, the second director or the Rosenberg Foundation in San Francisco.

Down time: Woodworking. I make furniture.

Causes: Youth and poverty.

Most like to meet: Warren Buffett. I admire the guy. He invests with the idea of getting profit. That's the same as venture philanthropy.

— Sarah Duxbury ■