Philanthropy –
Why It Matters and Why We Celebrate It!

When WordPress asked its subscribers about philanthropy and what it means to them, some of the common responses were:

- “It means giving of one’s resources—time, voice, or money—to a cause seen as beneficial for the greater community good.”

- “Philanthropy is sharing one’s resources, but it also delves into one’s passion to create and enhance civil society. Philanthropy is one tool we use to make this world a bit more hospitable and enhance the quality of life—which has a great effect on all of us.”

- “Philanthropy ... is looking outward rather than inward. It is giving of time, energy, knowledge, or money to aid others. Being philanthropic means giving of oneself to improve the human condition.”
Philanthropy Matters

We all feel good when we help other people. It doesn’t matter whether we are giving money, time, or advice — it’s the giving that counts. We find motivation in causes that we relate to, or issues that tug at our heartstrings. Some even find that receiving recognition of their time or gift is what makes them the most satisfied. However, the one common denominator, when we are giving, is that it matters — it matters to us as donors and it matters to the group or organization that is receiving the gift. It makes a difference in peoples lives.

And in Utah — philanthropic blood runs through our veins! We have led the nation for 10 years in volunteering: 47.7% of our residents 16 and older volunteer. We lead the nation in the giving of monetary donations, with the state average in Utah at $2,516 per year. We respond to disasters to do recovery work before the government can respond. We reach out to help children and the homeless. We embrace the philosophy of Winston Churchill: “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”

Philanthropy is critical in the nonprofit sector. Without the involvement of donors and volunteers, not-for-profit agencies and organizations cannot achieve their goals of service, education, treatment, or creativity. In the corporate-giving world, where I work every day, philanthropy comes with expectations, return on investment, measurable outcomes, and collaboration to achieve mutual goals. In the end, if all of those components work together, the corporation feels good about having invested their funds in the community. Really, one cannot survive without the other!

Celebrate It!

Every year since November 15, 1986, when National Philanthropy Day was designated by President Ronald Reagan, communities across the country have celebrated by hosting events to recognize activities of donors, volunteers, foundations, leaders, corporations, and others engaged in philanthropy. In Utah, we celebrate volunteers and philanthropists during the second week in November with the Utah Philanthropy Day luncheon, where we honor specific individuals, corporations, foundations, and volunteers who have been nominated by the organizations and individuals they have served.

In 1999, the Utah Society of Fund Raisers and the Utah Nonprofits Association began holding the annual celebration luncheon to honor Utah’s philanthropists and volunteers. In 2014, UServeUtah, the state’s Commission on Service and Volunteerism, joined as a partner organization to bring this event to a broader audience. Seven prestigious awards honor various components of philanthropy in Utah through nominations solicited from the community. They are: the Philanthropic Leadership Award, the Norma Matheson Outstanding Volunteer Award, the Governor’s Career Humanitarian Leadership Award, the Lt. Governor’s Public Service Award, the Foundation Spirit of Giving Award, the Corporate Spirit of Giving Award, and the Outstanding Young Volunteer Award. In addition to these honorees, nonprofit agencies and organizations can nominate an outstanding volunteer(s) to receive the Heart & Hands Award at this luncheon.

I have served on the committee of community leaders that organizes and selects nominees for the past three years, serving as co-chair of the event in 2014, and I continue to be involved and supportive each year. It has long been my favorite event. It is a celebration of various heights — those who lead the community with large donations, to family foundations who give to specific causes, to a young person who gathers backpacks for homeless children, to the retired couple who have volunteered their time as docents at the local museum for 10 years. Nothing can change your outlook on people and community better than hearing from a volunteer who has served the firefighters in her community, or the 12 year-old who has served at the food bank and who stands up and admonishes those in attendance to “Please, everyone reach out and help someone. You will be amazed by what a little love can do!” Or listening to a well-known leader and philanthropist in the community talk about how giving in order to help children succeed at home and at school has blessed his life. There is something truly magical about the Utah Philanthropy Day luncheon because it is a celebration of what can happen when the nonprofit sector, the business sector, and individuals pool their time and money to make a difference in the lives of people and services in their communities. It is the ultimate in celebrating philanthropy — and recognizing that matters!