



GREAT DIAMOND
PARTNERS



Giving in a Time of Coronavirus

FINDING A SILVER LINING
THROUGH YOUR CHARITABLE LEGACY

BY JOSEPH POWERS

Countless times since last March, I've looked up from some task at my desk and found myself staring down into Monument Square, the historic city center outside my office in downtown Portland, Maine.

I witness a steady increase in the number of people visibly gripped by poverty, addiction, or possibly mental illness. Their numbers have grown, spurred, no doubt, by the ravages of a newly resurgent pandemic.

I've wondered as time has passed and perspectives changed if there isn't a silver lining, for some of us, in the gravest public-health crisis in a hundred years. Lockdowns, social-distancing, and work-from-home options have given the lucky ones among us the unexpected gift of time.

Many of us have used this gift to enrich our lives by, for example, reading books we've neglected, perfecting culinary skills, and re-engaging with hobbies. Some of us have even used this enforced pause to reflect on our lives and ponder what's really important to us, rekindling traits of humility, grace, and empathy worn smooth by time and the facile inducements of materialism. And as the picture grew bleaker so many saw what was happening and reached out giving unconditionally of their time, talent and treasure.

This line of thinking led my colleagues and I at Great Diamond Partners, to spearhead a campaign in April 2020 called Great to Good, which partnered with Good Shepherd Food Bank here in Maine to provide lunches to school-age children who were deprived of access to free breakfast and lunch programs when the coronavirus hit. With the incredible support of colleagues and friends we raised \$25,000 in three months to provide lunches in all of Maine's 16 counties, from Fort Kent to Kittery.

Furthermore, we are passionately engaged in a variety of ways; providing exposure for kids to the arts, mentoring at-risk youth, offering counseling for our immigrant population, supporting our local childrens' hospital and helping to feed our multitudes of hungry throughout Maine.

Through the recent flurry of philanthropy, and in my 30 years as a wealth manager, I've come to understand that Mainers tend to give quietly, shunning fanfare and recognition, and zeroing in on tangible human need. It is one of the many attractive traits that makes Maine such a beautiful place to live and work.

As the shadow of pandemic lingers, darkens even, across our lives, I see this instinctual generosity bearing fruit that will benefit Maine and its people long after the present crisis melts into memory.

a second wave

Back in April 2020, as states across the country moved precipitously to reopen their economies after a lockdown period of about five weeks, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) forecasted what we're seeing now: the "second wave" phase of the coronavirus pandemic, a period characterized by a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

In early November, Maine put two of its most populous counties back in "code yellow," calling for heightened vigilance around social-distancing at schools throughout the state, and mandated masks in all public spaces, even where people can keep at least six feet apart.

As I write this, the mortality count from Covid-19 has topped approximately 264,000 in the US, and the number is growing alarmingly. The University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts a mid-range tally of around 400,000 dead from Covid-19 by February 2021. Bluntly, we are on track in the US to add 41.3% more Covid deaths in three months than we've seen in the previous eight.

Meanwhile, fiscal relief afforded by the CARES Act — which helped keep the economy afloat in the pandemic's first months by increasing unemployment benefits for workers displaced by the pandemic, issuing stimulus checks, and extending low-interest loans to businesses — ran out in July, leaving many low-income families to get by on fumes. Additional stimulus initiatives are tragically stalled in partisan gridlock.

Academic studies support the view that the CARES Act alone won't be enough, bolstering the impression I get when I look out at Monument Square.

“The CARES Act’s stimulus checks and unemployment benefits lifted more than 18 million individuals out of monthly poverty in April, but this number fell to around 4 million individuals in August and September after the expiration of the \$600 per week unemployment supplement,” according to an October 2020 study by the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University.

Whatever measures our politicians take to combat the pandemic, and even with the advent of a vaccine, assuming that the worst of the public-health crisis is over seems like wishful thinking. There is work to be done.

angel of the trash heap

In the face of this reality, we can be inspired by the understanding that it doesn’t take a ready-made movement to affect significant positive change with charitable giving of oneself and create lasting impact.

Mainer Hanley Denning was learning Spanish in Guatemala 21 years ago when she first caught sight of the dump in the country’s capital, a desolate and unhygienic hellscape where children picked through piles of rotting garbage for scraps to subsist on. She determined there and then to skip the graduate program waiting for her stateside, sold her car and her computer, and founded Safe Passage, a non-profit that began as a drop-in center for hungry children in a chapel near the dump.

Through Denning’s passion and persistence, the programs expanded, and the organization grew to include an early childhood center, extracurricular activities such as art classes and athletics, tutoring programs, and funds to purchase school uniforms and supplies. Through Safe Passage, over 600 students now receive an education that can help them escape poverty of the city dump.



Denning — known to Guatemalans as “El Angel del Basurero” (Angel of the Trash Heap) — died in an accident in 2007, but she remains a potent reminder that great good can come from small grass roots starts.

a well-known legacy

Arguably, for the most famous and inspiring example of the transformative power of philanthropy and legacy initiated by individuals with passion and intelligence, consider Bill Gates. Not the co-founder of Microsoft, but his father, Bill Gates, Sr.

It was the senior Gates’ insistent vision that shaped what would become the \$47 billion Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with much of the groundwork laid while his namesake was mired in legal battles over Microsoft tactics deemed anti-competitive by authorities in several major markets, including the European Union.

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Basking for the better part of 20 years in the glow of good works from the foundation his father initiated, few now remember how deep in the reputational doghouse the junior Gates' was in the late 1990s. More important, the Gates Foundation has distributed \$7.8 billion combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, the world's biggest killer.

Gates, Sr. also believed the rich should pay more in taxes in relative terms than poor and middle-class residents — for the simple money-making reason that democracies are conducive to new-wealth building. In his book “Showing Up for Life: Thoughts on the Gifts of a Lifetime” (2009), Mr. Gates, Sr. wrote: “Those who claim that the wealth they have accumulated is theirs to pass on without returning anything back to the American system show a shocking lack of appreciation for all that the system and public monies did to help them create wealth.”

In this spirit, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 affords the wealthy an obvious opportunity for

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largesse. From this bounty one could be motivated to heed a call for charitable giving and beneficence. Charitable giving in this environment, and in any environment, can also help wealthy families establish a legacy built around shared values and a lasting impact on communities.

a silver lining

If there is a silver lining, a chance to find a deeper meaning, in this tragic pandemic — I humbly offer that it could be in discovering one's charitable legacy. Beyond the simple words that are read at one's eulogy — a legacy is something that is a catalyst for creating an impact of good for generations to come.

I paused while typing just minutes ago and found myself gazing once again into Monument Square. There is so much, big and small, to do for each other, and for posterity, in this period of tension and uncertainty to assist our neighbors in our communities and beyond.

I profoundly believe this is a challenge Mainers will embrace.



Joe is a co-founder and head of financial planning at Great Diamond Partners, our wealth-management firm in Portland, Maine.

Reach him at 207.274.2507 or jpowers@greatdiamondpartners.com to discuss your charitable legacy.