

Finding our own philanthropic path

Register

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What do you think of when I say the word philanthropist?

Before I started working in the nonprofit industry, the word conjured images of random wealthy people in penthouses wearing monocles and expensive suits. Maybe you think of people like Warren Buffet and Bill Gates, willing and able to make positive changes on a global scale.

You may even picture local philanthropists like Ruth Parker and George Mylander, who make a difference so often, right here in Erie County.

Merriam-Webster defines philanthropist as “one who makes an active effort to promote human welfare.”

Have you ever dropped coins into the Salvation Army’s red buckets during the holidays? Volunteered in your child’s classroom? Put a dollar in the plate at church? Gone to a benefit dinner? If the answer to any of these questions is yes — you, my friend, are a philanthropist.

Now before you run out and buy yourself a monocle, what are you going to do with this new title?

How do we move from these good intentions to truly mindful philanthropy? The important question everyone needs to ask is how do we find our own philanthropic path?

Reality is, everyone brings something different to the table: different abilities, different talents and different passions. We each make our own philanthropic path.

My father was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis almost 20 years ago. Since then, the disease has affected his ability to carry out many of the daily living tasks most of us take for granted.

Seven years ago, my father received an assistance dog. This assistance dog can do everything from finding and retrieving a misplaced cane to helping him remove his socks when his body won’t allow him to do it on his own. His assistance dog has changed his life, not to mention she’s furry and very cute.

Needless to say, the charitable organization that provides assistance dogs to people with disabilities holds a special place in his heart. Dad can’t volunteer to clean kennels, and he doesn’t have a million dollars to give them, but he does what he can when he can.

He has spoken to audiences on their behalf; he has participated in their capital and annual campaigns. He has also requested members of our family buy supplies for the dogs in training instead of buying him birthday or Christmas gifts.

He is doing what he can for an organization that has, quite literally, changed his life. Dad is finding his own philanthropic path; he is making an active effort to promote human welfare.

He is a philanthropist.

We can all be inspired by Mahatma Gandhi who said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." So let's all find our own path and make our own effort to promote human welfare — monocles optional.

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