

Philanthropy

A New Breed

Meet a few of the many who are profoundly changing the face of philanthropy today.

By Joanna L. Krotz

Wherever you go, whomever you talk to, the path of today's philanthropy starts with a story—a personal moment when heartrending need meets an outstretched hand. For Jeff Swartz, the third generation of his family to lead the Timberland Company in Stratham, New Hampshire, it began in 1988. He casually agreed to volunteer for a few hours at a local youth organization. Recounting the experience later, he says, “I found myself, not a mile from our headquarters, face to face with the stories you read about in the newspaper. I spent four hours with young recovering drug addicts in a group home. I painted some walls—and felt the world shaking under my feet.” Today Timberland, which has grown from a \$156 million company in 1989 to one worth \$1.5 billion in 2004, has developed an exceptional and profound commitment to service. In the pages that follow, *Town & Country* reports on Swartz and seven other representatives of this new breed of inspiring and ambitious donors and their agents: givers who are engaged, hands-on and interested in making a difference now rather than in leaving a legacy for a future they won't see.

One Person Makes a Global Difference

DAVID RICHARD, FOUNDER

Wheels for Humanity, Los Angeles

Headquartered in a 10,800-square-foot warehouse in North Hollywood, Wheels for Humanity (wheelsforhumanity.org) refurbishes wheelchairs to ship overseas to people who can't afford one. Volunteers do most of the work. “I'm good at getting wheelchairs to people, but I never learned to ask for money,” says David Richard, forty-nine, the founder of the grassroots group. “Every month I think we won't be able to make the rent or payroll, and then, for some miraculous reason, a check comes in.”

Begun in David's garage in 1996, WFH was inspired by the efforts of his brother Mark. While visiting Guatemala in the mid-'80s, Mark Richard saw a disabled woman by the side of the road who moved by dragging herself along by her elbows. Then thirty-one, the woman had been paralyzed by polio at age seven. Mark returned later with used wheelchairs for the woman and eighteen other people with disabilities.

Inspired, David, then a sales manager for a golf-supplies company, began collecting and refurbishing wheelchairs. He took 160 of them to Guatemala late in 1995. The next year he incorporated WFH as a 501(c)(3), and he's been at it ever since, accepting only a small annual salary.

In the U.S., new wheelchairs start at \$300, and thousands are discarded each year. Worldwide, roughly 120 million people with disabilities need mobile chairs, but average annual income in developing countries is less than \$1,000, so millions must spend their lives lying down, unable to move around. WFH can fit and deliver a chair for \$120.



At the WFH warehouse in Los Angeles, David Richard and a small army of volunteers retrofit about 5,000 wheelchairs a year for disabled children and adults around the world. Photograph by Fergus Greer.

