

GIVING



SAIF ISOOF



ESTRELLITA SIBILLA

MAKING AN IMPACT

Passion drives South Floridians to help others fulfill their promise

BY JENNY STALETOVICH
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Profiling the lives and background of those making a difference in your community and beyond.

PENNY STAMPS



STAMPS FAMILY FOUNDATION

Background: A former interior designer, Stamps has served on the boards of private schools along with community and arts organizations. Her family foundation, which she co-founded with her husband Roe, a venture capitalist, has provided millions of dollars in scholarships. She also funded the University of Michigan's Distinguished Speakers Series and last month gave \$32.5 million to the university's School of Art and Design, the largest gift ever given to the school.

Current position: Co-founder and president of the Stamps Charitable Family Foundation.

Tip: "You have to have something that is your passion button, and I think sometimes it takes a while to find it."

Penny Stamps is best known for the millions she has given to education. Dozens of college students at 30 schools around the country — including 19 music students at the University of Miami — receive full college scholarships through the Stamps Scholars program.

Stamps also has funded a distinguished ensembles program at UM as well as contributing time and money to other organizations including Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and City Year.

Less known is her 1996 brush with disaster. She and her family were asleep in their Key Largo house when her cat, rescued from a shelter, jumped on her to alert her to smoke. As the garage burned down, Stamps, her husband, daughter and dog safely escaped.

It's always been her style to pay it forward. So after that fateful night, Stamps not only gave money for a new veterinary clinic to manage the 300 feral cats roaming the Ocean Reef Club, but almost 20 years later

is still the driving force caring for the cats.

"That keeps me very, very grounded in the philanthropic world because I know it's so hard to run a little charity," she said. "Yeah, I could just write a check and endow it forever and that's the simplest thing. But I want it to be able to stand on its own. I just don't want to be the feeder."

Passion, whether it's education or cats, unites her causes. She focuses on education because, as a product of a public university, she said she understands it had "an enormous impact on our success." Cats, on the other hand, inspire her nurturing side.

"You have to have something that is your passion button and I think sometimes it takes a while to find it. I've always been nutty for my pets," she jokes. "But I didn't realize how nutty."



C.W. GRIFFIN / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

CLIFFORD THOMAS

Background: Vice president of operations at Physicians Access Group, Thomas has spent two decades working with inner city youth, focusing on economic empowerment, education, health and wellness. He has spearheaded food drives and Christmas shopping sprees and last year helped organize a Thanksgiving food drive that provided hot meals to more than 1,000 people. He has also mentored boys in middle school and high school and created partnerships that provided laptops to Miami Gardens youths.

Current position: Vice president of programs for 100 Black Men of South Florida, youth director at Liberty City Church of Christ.

Tip: "Sometimes you have to make your changes one child at a time."

Clifford Thomas doesn't mind counting his successes by ones.

"If you just try to grab one child and keep him out of jail or have him thinking about college and looking to the future, hopefully those ones add up," Thomas said.

Thomas grew up in Brownsville in a

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house with five siblings and a single mom. Good-hearted and church-going, he recalls, "she kept me pretty straight." But the absence of a father left an impression. So as his professional career blossomed — he's now vice president of operations for Physician Access Urgent Care Group — he looked for ways to help kids. He became a youth leader at the Liberty City Church of Christ 17 years ago. And when he encountered the 100 Black Men of South Florida seven years later, he joined the organization, which was founded in 1963 by professional black men in New York City hoping to improve their community.

Over the years, Thomas has taken countless kids on holiday shopping trips and led Thanksgiving food drives. He has mentored kids in middle school and high school, as well as participated in the group's numerous programs including a leadership academy at the Overtown Youth Center. This year, Thomas organized the chapter's first college fair to showcase area students. About 60 colleges and universities attended the two-day fair in October, drawing between 3,000 and 4,000 students, he said. Next year, he's shooting for 100 schools.

"There are some truly dedicated men in this community," he said, "and to be surrounded by them, I'm really inspired."



MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

KAREN FRYD

Background: A lifelong volunteer, she is a member of the National Council of Jewish Women, the Urban League, the Miami Beach and city of Miami Police Athletic Leagues and the city of Miami's Child Murder and Youth Violence Prevention Committee.

Current position: Founder and director of South Florida Youth Foundation, which has provided 5,000 backpacks packed with supplies yearly, more than 3,000 school uniforms and more than 50,000 items of new clothing. The association has also provided summer camp scholarships for 114 abused children, coordinated a midnight basketball

program in Overtown, supported a violin program at schools including Santa Clara Elementary School, provided gym equipment for Young Men's Preparatory Academy and created a cafe to help train mentally handicapped students at Booker T. Washington High School.

Tip: "It's important for people to go with the grain of who they are. Everyone doesn't have to have their own foundation. It's good to see what's out there and see what you want and what you could support."

Charles Dickens might say charity begins at home. But for Karen Fryd, it also starts nine minutes away.

Fifteen years ago, after bumping into an old family friend who taught at Frederick Douglass Elementary School in Overtown, Fryd began crossing the bridge from her Miami Beach home to visit Miami's inner city schools. She had already served as the chief volunteer for the Miami Beach Police Athletic League's annual Christmas toy drive. But visiting the schools firsthand opened her eyes.

"I remember I saw a child sleeping and this wasn't a little nap. This was REM sleep. I asked the teacher, 'Isn't that disrespectful?' and she said that child could have spent all night in a car. You just never know."

And never knowing has fueled Fryd ever since, prompting her to donate thousands of dollars and hours over the years for projects big and small. And hardly ever saying no. Eventually her husband insisted she form a nonprofit, the South Florida Youth Foundation, which Fryd runs by using her own money and donations from larger foundations such as the Batchelor Foundation.

The foundation flies well under the radar of almost everyone, but Fryd is a familiar face in the schools she helps, whether providing band instruments, uniforms or equipment for a state-of-the-art gym. She tries to focus on immediate needs, believing that small gestures can sometimes make a big difference.

She was once at Young Men's Preparatory Academy when administrators learned a student had missed a critical college application deadline, principal Leonard Ruan explained. Fryd got a friend to convince Syracuse University to take a look at the student. Then, when the student couldn't afford a plane ticket, she bought one. The student wound up landing a full-ride scholarship for the first year, Ruan said.

"Karen has stepped in and committed herself," said Ruan, who credited Fryd with singlehandedly increasing the school's enrollment by a third after recruiting students to the new middle school. "She's our voice

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in the community. We talk about schools and school business partnerships. And this is what we're talking about. Schools are going to get better because people like Karen are attached. She gets more excited than I do."

ESTRELLITA SIBILA



ALLISON DIAZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Background: An environmental and land use attorney, Sibila has been working to help her community since she was a law student at the University of Miami, where she helped run a tax assistance program. She was the first attorney in Miami-Dade County to be designated a LEED certified professional by the U.S. Green Building Council, and served on the Young Leaders Executive Committee of the United Way and the Estate and Gift Tax Planning Board of the Archdiocese of Miami. She also chaired the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce Green Task Force and served on the Miami Green Commission.

Current position: Co-founder of PhilanthroFest, which held its first fair in April connecting 90 nonprofit organizations to volunteers and donors at a daylong outdoor festival in Midtown.

Tip: "There's nothing better than hearing an actual story about how you've impacted someone and what you've learned from an experience in volunteering. That becomes the glue that helps bind a potential volunteer and the organization. It's the human factor."

Estrellita Sibila grew up in a Cuban family where giving wasn't a choice.

"My parents were adamant about us giving back, and even though we might have plenty now, we might not always," she said. "They always made it very important."

So that meant, sometimes unhappily for Sibila, handing over a favorite Christmas present to donate to a less fortunate kid.

That kind of training led Sibila to weigh philanthropy as much as profession in her life. In college and law school at the University of Miami, she ran a volunteer tax assistance program. She became involved in the

Cuban American Bar Association, chaired a green task force for the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and served on the board of the United Way's Young Leaders, along with numerous other activities.

The experience ultimately produced an important realization that ended with one of Miami's more unique fairs: PhilanthroFest. "I'd get invites from 15 different groups, but they were all doing the same thing. They'd have a cocktail hour or a networking event, but it wasn't really hands on," she said.

In April, Sibila and some friends staged the first PhilanthroFest in Midtown. Ninety nonprofits showed up to promote their causes at a fair that included music, an art show, dance performances and even a fashion show. The group is already organizing next year's festival, which will include 200 nonprofits, Sibila said.

"As cheesy as it sounds, it's really about an informed and engaged community," she said. "We have amazing resources, located in a place that's always going to be desirable. So now we have to make this an amazing community."



C.M. GUERRERO/EL NUEVO HERALD

TONY JIMENEZ

Background: Director of business development and residential sales at Reliant Real Estate Group, director of the board of governors of the MIAMI Association of Realtors, former staffer for George W. Bush's 2004 presidential campaign and a member of U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez' communications team. Jimenez also founded his own record label, Whisper Music, in 2007.

Current position: Co-founder and chairman of Roots of Hope and founding member of the Miami chapter of the Awesome Foundation.

Tip: "Maybe this generation is more sophisticated in the way they're donating time and money. We're learning from past experiences and using technology to our advantage."

Growing up in Miami, Tony Jimenez and his friends had been immersed in Cuban cul-

ture. But then they left for college. Jimenez headed to Gainesville, while friends went to Georgetown, Harvard and Princeton. Suddenly, Jimenez said, the group experienced an identity crisis.

"We had grown up in a Cuban community, but we realized we weren't as American as we thought we were," he said.

So in 2003, he and his friends founded Roots of Hope and began organizing conferences on campuses to bring Cuban students together. That led to talk about their counterparts in Cuba and the need for increasing communication. Before long, they were collecting old cellphones, trading them in and providing new ones on the island.

"People might look at it and say, 'What's the big deal about sending cellphones down there?' But the thing is, communication on the island is almost nonexistent. So to be able to give handsets that we purchase for \$40 and there they're selling for \$100 to \$120, that significantly lowers the cost and increases their access."

The success of the effort led Jimenez, who eventually wound up in Washington, D.C. working with George W. Bush's senior campaign staff in the 2004 election, followed by a job in U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez's communications team, to realize that small efforts can yield big change. So when a friend in the organization introduced him to the Awesome Foundation, he jumped at the chance to open a chapter in Miami. The program is run by a board of "micro trustees," who then hand out \$1,000 grants pooled from their own money.

"The beauty is it's decentralized and it's up to each [chapter] to create its own rubric. There's no strings attached to the grants, so you take your own risks, putting in your own money," he said. "The whole point is to motivate and offer a platform that's never before been offered."



EILEEN SOLER/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

RICHARD J. UNWIN AND GREGORY D. MOORE

Background: Husbands Unwin, a musician, and Moore, a retired insurance executive who works as a guardian ad litem in Broward

County, decided to create a legacy fund through the Community Foundation of Broward to address the needs of children. While the majority of the fund will come from their estate after they die, they have already contributed seed money that has supported the SOS Children's Village for foster children in Coconut Creek and Equality Florida, to support civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens in Florida.

Current position: Creators of the Unwin Moore Children's Voice Fund at the Community Foundation of Broward.

Tip: "A good community foundation can really open the community's eyes and get people excited about the different aspects of the needs," Moore said. "And in this whole, 'I got mine, the heck with you' culture, that's a good thing."

Richard Unwin didn't want much for his 70th birthday. Just a foundation.

Unwin was somewhat ruefully preparing for the milestone, recalls his husband Gregory Moore, when he announced his intentions. "He said, 'You know, I want to make sure we do something for kids in Broward County on an ongoing basis.' So I said, 'Great, let's see what we need to do.' And what I found out is it's not so easy to do."

Unwin, a musician, and Moore, a retired insurance executive, had been drawn to investing in children largely through Moore's work as a guardian ad litem in Fort Lauderdale for the past six years.

"We were fortunate enough to have wonderful parents who had their faults like we all do, but who gave us a great upbringing that informed our values," Moore said. "So it was important to us that children have a family whatever it looks like."

While the pair had money to do good, they weren't hugely wealthy and found that independent foundations, between tax and accounting requirements, were expensive to set up. So when they discovered the Community Foundation of Broward, they found their perfect solution.

The foundation allowed them to establish a legacy fund, leaving all their assets to the fund after they die. While they have laid out the general terms of the fund, their niece will serve as advisor to guide the specifics of giving after they die.

They also have deposited seed money in the fund, which has allowed them to make smaller grants to organizations including the SOS Children's Village, a collection of foster homes in Coconut Creek, and Equality Florida, the civil rights organization devoted to securing equal rights for Florida's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens.

"What we would like to see ideally," Moore said, "is every child in Broward County have a loving home in which they can grow up."