

PHILANTHROPIC

Lives

J.P.Morgan

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SHANNON B. AND THEODORE "TED" C. SKOKOS

Ted and Shannon Skokos
Foundation
UNITED STATES

- Ted Skokos served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve (1971-1992) and practiced law (1973-1994)
- Shannon Skokos won the title of Miss Arkansas (1992), then went on to receive her Juris Doctorate from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law, and, after retiring from the practice of law, she became a published author
- Mr. Skokos has been involved in many businesses, including The Flight Department, Aloha Partners, ATS Medical and 3F Therapeutics, plus several cellular telephone companies (since 1988)
- They established the Ted and Shannon Skokos Foundation (2008)
- The Skokoses were heavily involved in a campaign to build a multiveneue performing arts center in Dallas; the center was later named the AT&T Performing Arts Center (2009)
- They currently sponsor an educational learning lab through the Dallas Theater Center at Booker T. Washington High School for the Visual & Performing Arts, which was recognized with an award from First Lady Michelle Obama and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2014)

It is our responsibility to leave the earth a better place

Ted Skokos and his wife, Shannon, moved to Dallas from Arkansas in 2004. Less than four years later, they were spearheading the effort to create the AT&T Performing Arts Center and transform Dallas's downtown.

"I had never given a dime to the arts before," says Mr. Skokos. But he felt that Dallas's lack of a performing arts center meant it was missing opportunities for economic growth, as big businesses are typically attracted to areas with the widest appeal for employees. This perspective was rooted in Mr. Skokos's experiences as an attorney turned businessman. Ms. Skokos had a more personal understanding of the impact of the arts, having performed ballet for 13 years and been a flutist for 34 years.

The Skokoses ultimately committed \$12 million to the center through their foundation, and helped draw AT&T to the project through Mr. Skokos's relationship with the company.

The AT&T Performing Arts Center opened in 2009 and was a very public achievement. It cost \$374 million to build—93% of the funding came from private sources, many with \$1 million gifts. Moreover, other philanthropists looking to improve their communities were encouraged because the center may have

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helped lure AT&T to Dallas. By 2015, Dallas had the largest urban arts district in the United States, spanning 69 acres in the heart of downtown.

But even as the Skokoses see large civic projects as the glue that helps bond a community, they also engage in more intimate forms of philanthropy. They believe that individuals should help other individuals directly. “To whom much is given, much is expected,” says Ms. Skokos, who even has a name for it: “The Riley Rule”—after someone who once helped her.

CLOSE TO HOME

In the middle of studying for law finals, Ms. Skokos learned her landlord was selling her condo and, if she didn’t buy the place, she’d have to move in two weeks. She didn’t have the funds.

Then Pat Riley, owner of an athletic club where she played tennis, found out about her dilemma and not only bought the condo, but also reduced her rent and said she could buy it from him at the same price when she had the money. All he asked in return was that she would help someone else one day.

“The Riley Rule,” says Ms. Skokos, “means to first empower others to achieve their goals, and second, to ask in return that those individuals one day help someone else to achieve their goals. It is a domino effect—and it is how you make a difference.”

Today, the couple pays college tuition for select young people who need financial assistance and who have “great potential for leadership and academic success.” The Skokoses also empower others by funding and/or volunteering in 20 different projects: 18 in Dallas, two in Arkansas.

“If there are problems in your community, you can’t criticize if you are not prepared to go in there, understand and make a difference.”

This focus on local community has become more pronounced over the years. The Skokoses funded international projects before they discovered that many of the same issues were on their own doorstep.

It also reflects the fact that the couple likes to be hands-on. The Skokoses sit on multiple boards and volunteer on projects they fund. Recent projects include coaching basketball to children in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, rehabilitating girls rescued from sex trafficking, working with disabled orphans and building Habitat for Humanity homes. They also fund a program that enables top theater students at a local performing arts high school to work with the resident acting company of the Dallas Theater Center.

“If there are problems in your community, you can’t criticize if you are not prepared to go in there, understand and make a difference,” says Ms. Skokos, adding “Judge not, as you know not the valleys through which another has tread.”

As an example, she describes taking underprivileged children to meet Dallas’s mayor to learn about city government and voice their concerns about their community. On one occasion, an eight-year-old boy in a group of 8-to-12-year-olds told the mayor he “was tired of seeing dead people on his doorstep in the morning.” Ms. Skokos believes this experience has had a lasting effect not only on the boy, but also the mayor.

“I am always telling young people that if you want to be successful, you must dream big, set realistic goals, work hard and don’t make excuses,” says Ms. Skokos. “A brick wall is nothing more than an opportunity to prove how badly you want something.”

DRIVE AND DEDICATION

This can-do attitude is how the Skokoses approach not only their philanthropy, but also their lives.

After practicing law for 21 years, Mr. Skokos retired in 1994 and became involved in a variety of enterprises, including Aloha Partners L.P., which held the largest number of 700 MHz wireless spectrum licenses in the United States and was acquired by AT&T Mobility in February 2008.

For her part, Ms. Skokos was a motivational speaker for nine years. She won the Miss Arkansas Scholarship Pageant in 1992 and used the funds



▲ GETTING INVOLVED—The Skokoses' many community efforts include sports coaching for children in transitional homes and volunteering for Habitat for Humanity.

awarded to pay for law school. After practicing law for eight years, she is now a partner in her husband's business ventures and an active philanthropist. She has also published a book entitled *Ask God's Creatures and They Will Teach You*.¹

Both Skokoses warn that it is easy to spread oneself too thin. At one time, Ms. Skokos served on 13 different boards and 21 different committees. "I was exhausted!" she says, laughing, yet making it clear neither she nor her husband is prepared to slow down anytime soon.

Little wonder. They are greatly motivated by their Christian faith, seeing both their professional success and their philanthropy as expressions of their religious beliefs and their hope for others to have better lives.



"We don't wear our faith on our sleeves," says Mr. Skokos, "but we do believe it is our responsibility to leave this earth better than we found it—whether that is through a small act of kindness or a big change."

key notes

- Philanthropy comes in many forms; practice both civic and personal philanthropy to empower others to realize their dreams
- Use your time and financial resources wisely

¹ www.askgodscreatures.com/bookstore.

It's a great age of exploration

“What are others doing?” These days, that’s one of the most common questions that philanthropists consider.

In search of an answer, we spoke with 31 of today’s most prominent and inspiring philanthropists, ranging in age from 30 to 80. While each of their journeys is unique, they have all dedicated substantial financial resources and personal time to helping neighbors, communities and countries around the world.

Through their stories, you’ll see the tremendous variety of approaches to philanthropy. They show the interesting and complex environment in which new models and innovations from recent decades are being field tested and disseminated. In fact, philanthropists often deploy a number of methods, all at the same time.

Hearing from peers will hopefully help you develop your own philanthropic mission and provide an opportunity to learn from their successes and mistakes so that you can make your efforts as effective as possible.

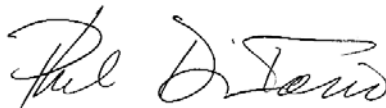
In many respects, we are in a great age of exploration in philanthropy with many ways to be effective:

- At the juncture of business and philanthropy, we find many models for corporate social responsibility, venture philanthropy, impact measurements and socially responsible investing—to name just a few approaches.
- We see traditional philanthropy continuing to accomplish great things and being reinvigorated by a new generation. There also is traditional philanthropy with a twist: For example, some philanthropists are setting a mission—then creating ways for others to join their causes.

- Across the globe, philanthropists are finding different ways to engage recipients that identify and shape responses to community needs.
- Private-public partnerships are helping bring answers to scale. Philanthropists are creating, funding and testing programs to identify models that work—and that governments can then adopt for society at large.

These 31 philanthropic lives showcase a diverse range of causes: from empowering the poor in Mexico through vocational education, to new approaches out of Scandinavia for tackling climate change, to developing a vibrant social sector in China and beyond.

We hope you will find these philanthropists' stories inspiring, and that their work can help you refine your own strategy for your personal philanthropic endeavors. We look forward to working with you as you develop your own approach to changing the world for the better.



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