

The Almanac

# Community

STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY



**In the past 20 years**, the Sand Hill Foundation has developed a reputation for being nimble, responsive and aware of the community's changing needs, says foundation President Susan Ford Dorsey.

**On the cover:** Caryl Winter holds her son Brian in the playground at Haven Family House in Menlo Park.



**Child development teacher** Rosa Ayala reads to a child at Haven Family House in Menlo Park.

# Caring for community

After 20 years of giving, Sand Hill Foundation is just getting started

Story by Kate Bradshaw | Photos by Michelle Le

**I**nnVision Shelter Network. The Peninsula Open Space Trust. The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula. Dana Schmidt, programs officer at the The Hewlett Foundation. What do these have in common?

They've all received funding from the Sand Hill Foundation, the philanthropic initiative of the late and legendary Sand Hill Road developer Tom Ford, and his wife Susan Ford Dorsey, who still serves as president and lives in Woodside.

That foundation turns 20 this year, and since it launched in

1995, it has provided more than \$88 million to local nonprofits and programs, particularly to address problems relating to health, the environment and economic security. In the last 20 years, Ms. Ford Dorsey says, the foundation has developed a reputation for being nimble, responsive, and aware of the community's changing needs. Three local long-term beneficiaries of the foundation's support are InnVision Shelter Network, the Peninsula Open Space Trust, and Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula.

Bruce Ives, CEO of InnVision Shelter Network, says the Fords supported what was then the San Mateo County Shelter Network beginning in 1992, before the Sand Hill Foundation was even established. Since then, the foundation has been a "significant contributor" to Haven Family House in Menlo Park, which provides interim shelter and services for 23 otherwise homeless families and boasts a success rate of more than 90 percent in helping families find and retain stable, permanent housing after a six-month program.

He says the foundation has demonstrated a "long-term commitment to helping homeless people in our community," adding that its reliable support from year to year adds stability to help the nonprofit address homelessness year-round.

"Homelessness has never gone away," Mr. Ives says. "It's gone up and down."

The foundation doesn't stop with giving money, he says. Foundation staff, such as Executive Director Ash McNeely, often give his organization strategic advice and help nonprofits with similar objectives collaborate.

The environment is another cause long supported by the Fords. When the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) was started in 1977, it was Mr. Ford who provided the trust its first office on Sand Hill Road. In 2006, POST moved offices to Palo Alto. The trust has helped to save more than 75,000 acres of open space and parkland in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz counties, according to Marti Tedesco, spokeswoman for POST. "We're so grateful that we have partners like the Sand

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Hill Foundation, who see the environment and sustainability through the same lens that we do," she said.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula has also had a longstanding partnership with the Sand Hill Foundation, says executive director, Peter Fortenbaugh.

In 1993, Susan Ford Dorsey co-founded the Center for a New Generation, an after-school academic enrichment program, with Condoleezza Rice. Since 1996, it has been operated by the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula.

"Sand Hill (Foundation) has been an incredible partner for BGCP," Mr. Fortenbaugh said. "Their long term and generous financial support has helped us expand our school based programs and deepen our partnerships with schools."

**Giving Back**

In addition to its impact on empowering local nonprofits, the Sand Hill Foundation has had an impact on the philanthropy workforce. In 2001, the foundation established the Tom Ford Fellowship in Philanthropy, which provides three Stanford graduates with a salary, health insurance, and mentorship to pursue work at any U.S. foundation.

In 2006, Dana Schmidt was selected for the fellowship and went to work at another Menlo Park-based philanthropy: the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. There, she spent a year with the foundation's president, Paul Brest, working on philanthropy in international education and supporting Mr. Brest's research for a book on strategic giving.

"It was very much a launching pad for me," Ms. Schmidt says of her Tom Ford Fellowship experience. "As I think about myself vis a vis other colleagues at the foundation and program officers, I am very thankful."

She also says that the Hewlett Foundation has since launched its own three-year fellowship program in response to the Tom Ford Fellowship program's demonstration of how valuable it could be to give people early in their careers the opportunity to work in philanthropy.

**Susan Ford Dorsey**

Co-founder and president of the foundation, Ms. Ford Dorsey, 61, has spent the last two decades working in philanthropy full-time, and nearly a lifetime in community service. Her eyes light up when she recalls a formative experience with giving when she was 10 years old.



**Oscar Lopez**, a second-grade mentor for the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula, helps a student with her history homework.

In Santa Cruz, where she grew up, she was out with her parents helping deliver toys at Christmastime to children of low-income families. What struck her, she says, was the look of excitement on the faces of the parents.

"Their Christmas was just like our Christmas," she says, and by that she means that the parents of her less-affluent peers had the same aspirations for their children — health, happiness and security — as her parents had for her.

But the experience came with a dose of wisdom, too: Those parents were going to have a much harder time giving their kids the same kind of opportunities she had as the daughter of a local doctor.

A commitment to philanthropy and community service stayed with her, she says, as she grew up and went to college. She attended the University of California at San Diego, majoring in cellular biology, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she attained a master's degree in public health.

Even while serving as president of Health Innovations, a healthcare consulting firm she founded, she volunteered with nonprofits and was a court-appointed child advocate.

Even after 20 years of fulltime philanthropy, Ms. Ford Dorsey shows no signs of slowing down. Twenty years from now, she says, the foundation will still be around. In the last five years, she

says, preserving open space in the Peninsula has become more challenging, and she expects the challenge to escalate in the future. She has also seen an uptick in the need for increased educational opportunities for "poor immigrant children."

"How you survive in this community without a lot of money is changing," she says. More than ever before, "you need a college education in order to survive."

"There will always be kids who need help," she says. "As much wealth as there has been here, there are certainly a lot of people in need and a lot of pain."

**Tom Ford**

Tom Ford was a real estate developer, philanthropist, and Portola Valley resident. His work as a developer made him one of the key forces behind Sand Hill Road becoming the "capital of venture capital."

According to Ms. Ford Dorsey, even though Mr. Ford was a transplant to California from Ohio, he quickly came to love the area. He received bachelor's degrees in economics and industrial engineering in 1942, served as a Navy officer in World War II, and received a law degree in 1949 from the University of Michigan Law School.

He worked in Stanford's business office as director of land development for 10 years before starting his own business as a real estate developer.

He was a trustee of the Stanford University board of trustees,

Stanford Children's Hospital, Peninsula Open Space Trust, and served as president of the Santa Clara County United Fund and chairman of the Portola Valley Planning Commission.

Mr. Ford's priorities as a real estate developer were twofold, Ms. Ford Dorsey says. He wanted to build "developments that

were consistent with the environment," and stronger business communities.

According to the foundation's website, Mr. Ford set up a tradition of donating 25 percent of rent received from the Sand Hill Road office development to nonprofit organizations serving the broader community. ■



**Tom Ford**, Sand Hill Road developer and Silicon Valley philanthropist, started the foundation in 1995, three years before his death.