

Withers family gives back to community

Charles and Barbara Withers have a simple philosophy that guides their philanthropy: Rochester has been good to the lifelong residents and they want to give back to the community.

It is with that that they have been long-time donors to the Rochester Area Foundation. They were further spurred in 1992 to establish a donor-advised fund in their name as a "good way to perpetuate our giving," Barby Withers said, noting that it also creates a legacy for the family's name. It was the foundation's second such fund ever created. Today, there are 37 such funds, which can be created with as little as \$10,000.

The Witherses have given throughout the years, however, their philanthropy was kept quiet during the time Chuck Withers owned the Post-Bulletin in order to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest. The Withers family sold the newspaper to its current owners in 1977.

Both Chuck and Barby Withers are second-generation lifelong Rochester residents. They live in a home built by her father in 1936. The couple purchased the home from her parents when they built another home next door.

While Chuck Withers is best known in the community for his role at the Post-Bulletin, he also served as president of the Olmsted County Historical Society, served on the board of the Rochester Family YMCA, was a Rotary Club member and also was involved with statewide journalistic societies.

Barby Withers has had a long involvement

with corrections in the community, volunteering in a number of positions. Her involvement goes back more than 40 years, when she helped round up girls in the community to dance with boys at a reform school. Today, she has helped make the jail library what it is after 20 years of volunteer service. In fact, the first gift the Witherses made out of their donor-advised fund was a gift to help develop a core library collection at the then-new Olmsted County Jail.

"We both really love Rochester," Barby Withers said in an interview in the couple's southwest Rochester home.

While the Witherses have used the Rochester Area Foundation to carry out their philanthropic goals, they became intimate with the organization from the 12 years Barby Withers served on its board from 1977 to 1989. She recalls the morning that Bill Harwick called her at 8 in the morning to come over and visit to convince her to join the foundation's board.

"There was so much work," she said. "I never worked so hard."

During her time on the board, Barby Withers headed the grants committee and she later served on the foundation's 50th anniversary planning committee in 1994. Their son, John Withers, also served on the foundation's board and as chair.

The donations that the Witherses have made through their donor-advised fund are primarily targeted at children, especially for corrections and education, and to organizations in the city they love.



Chuck and Barby Withers enjoy giving back to their lifelong community.

"We've lived a wonderful life," Barby Withers said, "and we're trying to give something back."

The couple enjoys working with the Rochester Area Foundation in watching over their fund.

"Every time something has come up to give to ..., I would call (Executive Director) Steve (Thornton) and there never was a problem," Barby Withers said.

Chuck Withers added that he appreciates the letters the foundation sends out to fund owners with requests for funding. The foundation is able to act as a conduit for funding requests and fund owners are able to review the requests and respond to those that appeal to their interests.

"I like that," Chuck Withers said.

Persons who have funds with the foundation should tell their friends about their investment in the community and explain how the fund works, Barby Withers said, noting that it would help generate others to create similar funds.

"In Rochester, everyone is so willing to give of themselves," she said. "We're really lucky to do this."

Lasting Legacies

8

Rochester Area
Foundation

Gifts

1944 - 2004