

Glendenning focuses on 'preservation' causes

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Perhaps there is no single profile when a Dallas nonprofit group looks for a campaign leader, but super lawyer Don Glendenning certainly has most of the qualifications.

Among Don Glendenning's (seated, with Opus the penguin on his lap) causes is the Dallas Zoological Society. With him at the zoo are (from left) Jennifer Altabef, Michael Meadows and Maria Martineau Plankinton.



Dallas is fortunate to have many prominent residents who answer the call to make the nonprofit sector a success. This column will point out just a few.

At first glance, Mr. Glendenning's civic résumé appears eclectic. But there is a common thread that might be called "preservation" – of human life and principles, animals and our environment. Mr. Glendenning, a managing partner of the Dallas office of Locke Liddell & Sapp LLP, serves as:

- Chairman of the Dallas Zoological Society, where he first became involved as pro bono counsel in mid-1980s.
- Chairman of Thanks-Giving Square, which he's worked with since 2000.
- President of Scenic Dallas and Scenic Texas, which he has been involved with since 1999. He also helped draft the "no new billboard" ordinance for Dallas that was quickly copied by most surrounding municipalities.
- Past president of the Human Rights Initiative of Texas Inc., which he has worked with since 2000, shortly after it was created.
- Director, secretary and treasurer of the National Tree Trust, which he started working on with Trammell Crow in 1991, after Congress passed the America the Beautiful Act and President George H.W. Bush designated the charity as a national tree organization.
- Director and member of executive committee of Texas Trees Foundation, which he started working with in the mid-1990s.
- Director and member of executive committee of the Dallas Holocaust Museum. He just joined that effort this year.

'Cause addict'

"I am a self-confessed cause addict," Mr. Glendenning said. "My wife, Carol, also embraces a number of causes."

(And apparently super lawyers attract super lawyers; Carol Glendenning is a partner and chairs the policy committee at Strasburger & Price LLP.)

"However, she has felt compelled to institute a stringent house rule: no more than seven charitable boards and three charitable chairmanships or presidencies for me at any given time.

"I have always been drawn to those causes that can make a difference and am attracted to the people drawn to those causes."

For instance, he cites people such as philanthropist Mary McDermott Cook, with her unflagging commitment; the late Ed Robinson, a dedicated volunteer; and Michael Meadows, formerly executive director and now president and chief executive of the Dallas Zoological Society, who turned "a backwater charity into a real force in the community."

"Michael is an example of that rare commodity, an extremely capable manager of a charity."

It's rare but not exclusive to the Dallas Zoological Society, Mr. Glendenning said.

He lauded two leaders from a younger generation, Serena Simmons Connelly and Betsy Healy, for their "practically perfect" role in the start-up charity Human Rights Initiative.

"Dallas is fortunate in having a sizable group that makes Dallas charities successful," he said.

"They are the connectors, those who are involved in more than one charity at a time. Through sometimes only one person, they make for very powerful links.

"They form the core donors and fundraisers and the linkage with the board members of other charities.

"Then there are the gold standard of leaders such as Ebby [Halliday Acers] and Ruth [Altshuler]," Mr. Glendenning said. "When they say you or your company should do something, then you do it."

More families involved

Of course, Dallas is more cosmopolitan than it was 25 years ago, and while charities still rely on giving from corporations and old-line foundations, there is more family giving, often through newer family foundations.

Mr. Glendenning explained that when you seek backing for a nonprofit agency, you find yourself prioritizing more.

"If Louise [Gartner] or Caren [Prothro] makes something a priority, then it moves up considerably in my own priorities."

It's also natural for "law firms to be supportive in charitable causes and to be aligned with our clients," Mr. Glendenning said. "It builds bonds on both a personal and business level. The same holds true with many businesses and their customers."

Errors ahead

There are lots of successful fund drives to emulate, so Mr. Glendenning says he can't understand why some agencies and their boards "don't build relations with their donors."

"Their request in the mail looks like a statement, not a request," he said. "They display an air of expectation: 'We haven't gotten your check; please send it.' "

Another turn-off, he says, is the "purely 'commercial' honoring of someone" who never personally contributed time or money to causes that benefit the community.

"The tragedy is that there are so many people deserving of being honored, and it makes a mockery of the award for those recipients who came before and those who receive it in the future."

Also to be avoided: a board member who talks and talks but doesn't really do anything.

Quid pro quo

As in life in general, there is quid pro quo in volunteer leadership of nonprofits.

Mr. Glendenning became a member of the board of directors and executive committee of the Dallas Holocaust Museum just this year.

Chalk that up to the invitation from Frank Risch, a retired treasurer of Exxon Mobil Corp. who succeeded the late Ed Robinson both at Exxon Mobil and on the board of the Dallas Zoological Society.

Mr. Risch had to step down from the zoological society board this year to devote more time to his duties as president of Temple Emanu-El.

"But he knows I have a chit" by agreeing to serve on the museum board, Mr. Glendenning said gleefully, "and he knows he's going to be asked to return to the DZS board when his term at the temple ends.

"We all give to each other's charities; that's the engine that guarantees success."