
Editorial: Facebook's Newly Wealthy Must Consider Community



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Facebook is about to make a lot of our neighbors instant millionaires (and billionaires). OK, that's not fair. It was hardly "instant." Becoming a multibillion-dollar public company represents a tremendous amount of hard work. The buzz has been about how their spending will help the economy, and I hope they enjoy it. Buy that home in Atherton, or score that Tesla they've been eyeing. Heck, buy two!

But I hope they remember another opportunity that wealth, whether new or old, affords: giving back to your community.

Historically, this has been a real deficit in Silicon Valley. Well-known sociologist Robert Putnam called our region "The Valley of the Non-Joiners" for our lack of involvement and giving. This was in 1999, when the economy was hot and everyone thought DSL was awesome.

Compared to other metropolitan areas, Silicon Valley underperforms when it comes to giving. And the needs are great. One in four families here cannot simultaneously afford food, clothing, shelter and medical care. Schools struggle to keep up with state cutbacks. Our public health care safety net is straining to meet the growing needs of the uninsured and underinsured. Children go hungry, families can't find decent housing, and arts organizations live pay period to pay period.

This is not to say that some of the valley's most successful leaders haven't risen to the challenge. Noted developer John Sobrato and family have invested \$500 million (and counting) to support schools, human services and arts organizations. Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel, is improving the quality of health care in hospitals throughout the Bay Area. The Packard and Hewlett legacies live on through their namesake foundations. Many give privately.

That's critical to our future, because Silicon Valley does not exist just as a place for business and innovation. It's a living, breathing community. For all the talk of our world being flat and business being global, one of the most enduring lessons of Silicon Valley is that, in fact, place does really matter. If Facebook needed the valley to reach its full potential, the same works in reverse. That's not just by delivering a transformational product and blockbuster IPO — but by investing in this community deeply and meaningfully through philanthropy and other charitable endeavors.

As Facebook showed, big ideas often start small. Improving our schools and access to health care, reversing climate change — the answers will come the same way. They'll be small at first, then everywhere (and when Aaron Sorkin writes the screenplay, it will seem much more dramatic). At the local level — where organizations are less bound by the political dysfunction that defines so much of our public policy on the state and national level, and where real-world concerns trump the theoretical, things can actually get done.

As with Facebook and many other Silicon Valley firms, this region also attracts top talent overseeing a dynamic public and nonprofit sector. Want to change how we do health care in this country? There are local organizations, like mine, doing just that. Improving our schools, fighting hunger, cleaning our air and water, building a rich tradition of arts of culture? Ditto. You name it, and there is a Silicon Valley-based nonprofit organization doing amazing work, and in need of your help.

If we work together, we don't just change the valley — we create a model to change the world. Because in Silicon Valley, we always think big.

Don't know how to find us? Try Facebook. We nonprofits are all there too, hoping you will like us.

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