



There is a quote, generally attributed to Winston Churchill, which says, “You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give.”

I suspect I’m not alone in pondering the difference between talking in a well-intentioned way about supporting a non-profit cause and actually doing it. We all have a lot to balance in our lives and a lot to worry about. We’re told that time is our most precious commodity, and that rings true to most of us. Worries about what sort of future our country’s economy is facing cause us to clamp down a bit on our resources to prepare for a possible storm ahead. Even the causes in which we might become involved seem dwarfed in the wake of Katrina and the devastation in Pakistan, and our ability to affect such trauma seems dwarfed, as well.

And yet, in the face of all those same concerns, many people choose to act. They write a check to a nonprofit, spend a morning pulling purple loosestrife from the shoreline, teach adults to read. All over Northern Michigan, retirees, college students and whole families are finding ways to step in and make a difference in their own communities.

But I want to dig just a bit deeper here and acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed to an even smaller group of people, the individuals who actually create nonprofit organizations. These are the people who see the need for something—like the House of Hope, the Women’s Resource Center or The Little Traverse Conservancy—and do something about it. These founders of nonprofits have the courage needed to step outside of their own lives and create something simply because it’s the right thing to do in the face of a need. They donate their time and their own resources, working tirelessly for years before they step down, leaving behind flourishing organizations dedicated to making a difference.

For the first time since the Leelanau Conservancy’s inception 17 years ago, neither of its two founders, Ed and Bobbie Collins, will be sitting on the board of directors. But like the founders of all our region’s nonprofits, their heartfelt vision and determination is imprinted on the soul of the organization.

Lore has it that the idea of a Leelanau Conservancy had its roots in a dinner conversation among friends. It’s not uncommon for friends to express an interest in good works over a meal. But only a few stand up from such conversations and begin to blaze a trail. Only a few have the courage to create something from nothing, a cause potentially fraught with challenge, simply because it’s the right thing to do. Only a few have the generosity of spirit to invest their own time and money into creating something for the common good, when that investment clearly could have gone to more personal pursuits. Ed and Bobbie Collins are among those very few.

Editor’s Note

By Deborah Wyatt Fellows

The Greeks believed that a civilization flourishes when people plant trees under which they will never sit. Ed and Bobbie Collins will never till the soil of a farm field. But because of their vision, cherries will ripen in Leelanau County, grapes will grow sweet, young farmers will walk through fields of winter wheat shimmering in an evening light and think themselves the luckiest people on earth. Bobbie and Ed could never trek the vast wetlands that have been protected by the conservancy. And yet for generations to come, naturalists will exult in the life found there, knowing that, with each step in the pungent earth, water flows beneath them, clear and clean to our lakes, as it has since the glaciers passed through. Bobbie and Ed will never paddle the entire length of shoreline the conservancy has preserved. They can’t climb every ridge, traverse the miles of wildlife corridors or run their hands through the tall grass of every meadow. But on any given day, for as long as Leelanau County exists, others will.

People like Ed and Bobbie Collins have planted tree upon tree in Northern Michigan under which they will never sit. But because so many like them have done the same, the rest of us are given the opportunity to act. We don’t have to make something from nothing. We just have to participate.

As so many know, there is great joy to be found in volunteering and a kind of peace found in doing something for a cause we care about in the face of all that we can’t remedy. And there’s a reason the quote I began this column with still resonates: because we know it’s true that we make a life by what we give.

My best to you and yours this holiday season, and here’s to a year filled with giving. 📖

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P.S. Next issue we unveil a new look for *Traverse* along with some wonderful editorial additions, both of which will allow us to do an even better job of bringing Up North home to you each month. Let me know what you think!