

INSIDE LOOK: INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PLACES

The Sobrato Family Foundation doesn't simply give money away where needed, gaining appreciation and respect from the Silicon Valley community in return.

It operates so well, with so much accountability and motivational skill, that it has set a standard of excellence for foundations across the country—and possibly around the planet as well.

That's why the internationally recognized Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) selected the Sobrato Family Foundation to receive the 2007 Award for Outstanding Foundation, a coveted honor even the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has not yet snagged. Judges examined the Sobrato organization and decided it exemplified outstanding commitment through its fiscal generosity and beyond that, leadership in motivating others to give. The annual award is bestowed to a foundation that focuses on either national, international, or community efforts.

Since its inception in 1996, the foundation has dispensed over \$75 million in cash grants and over \$16 million in interest-free loans and in-kind donations.

Unlike other grant organizations that solely issue cash grants for various needs, he Sobrato Family Foundation provides two-year grants to nonprofit concerns, offers free building space to nonprofits,

and provides zero percent interest loans to nonprofit affordable housing developers. While new organizations can apply for funding, those with at least a three-year track record are favored.

The two-year grants are two-to-one challenge grants, meaning that the nonprofit must raise a matching amount from new or existing private donors in the first year's grant period in order to qualify for the foundation's second year of funding. So far, 100 percent of the nonprofits have met the criteria. According to executive director Diane Ford, "We work real hard to do our due diligence." Ford visits each nonprofit's location, sees the work in action, and meets with each executive director and board member. It may mean visiting a substance abuse facility one day, and going to a charter school on another. Two-year grants are unusual, Ford notes, for most foundations offer funds for one-year before an organization must reapply.

Grantees that pass the muster have to invest the funds in people or places—so money would go to salaries, training for its staff or board of directors, facility rent and utilities, or building construction or rehabilitation.

And since the business success of the Sobrato Development Companies has helped to endow the Family Foundation, it makes sense that the foundation generously donated and built an 85,000-square-foot office park in Milpitas, designated for nonprofit use, free of charge—an unheard of opportunity in Silicon Valley. According to Ford, qualifying nonprofits sign a three- or five-year lease to be housed at the Sobrato Center for Nonprofits. They pay \$1 a month for rent (for tax purposes), and can paint, decorate and furnish their spaces to make the place uniquely theirs. Beneficiaries have included the Emergency Housing Consortium, Family Giving Tree, Boys and Girls Club of Silicon Valley, Child Advocates of Silicon Valley, and others for a total of 30 tenants.

In Silicon Valley, Sobrato donations carry plenty of clout. The Family Giving Tree, a Bay Area nonprofit that gives backpacks and holiday gifts to underprivileged kids, has received over \$450,000 in cash grants and in office space. Today it occupies 4,500 square feet at the Sobrato Center, and chief financial officer Bob Cullenbine couldn't be happier. "In the building rent alone, we would have to pay over \$80,000 a year," he says. "There is no way we could afford a facility like this."

The Family Giving Tree will provide gifts to some 75,000 children in Silicon Valley this holiday, and Cullenbine says the Sobrato Family Foundation is, no doubt, helping to make that happen. "Compared to other nonprofits, we are very, very fortunate. They have very high standards, and it is an honor to be one of their recipients."

Also on site is the Sobrato Community Conference Center, a 5,000-square-foot facility with five meeting rooms and a computer technology lab. A Silicon Valley nonprofit can book a room for a meeting or training, free of charge. It's first come, first serve, and organizations sign up via the Internet on its website www.sobrato.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF THE PENINSULA

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula is a place where youth are welcome every day during the vulnerable after school hours and summer days. At each site, a team of youth development professionals and volunteers work through a broad range of programs to guide and inspire the youth to develop the attitudes and life skills they need to achieve their potential. The pictures are of children being recognized as part of its Achievement Matters Initiative for their Academic performance and leadership. From 1997-2006, the Sobrato Family Foundation has invested \$231,000 in Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula through cash grants. www.bgcp.org