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Bequests Put Conservative Billionaire Richard Scaife Atop List of America's 50 Biggest Donors

By Maria Di Mento and Drew Lindsay



Andy Starnes/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Richard Mellon Scaife, the Mellon banking and oil heir, left his largest bequests to two foundations he led for decades.

When Richard Mellon Scaife died at 82 in July 2014, obituaries called him one of the most influential activists in conservative politics. Now, his legacy must be updated to include a new title: 2015's most-generous American.

Mr. Scaife's will, which was executed last year, directed \$758.9 million in bequests to two private foundations, a museum, and an environmental group. These gifts put the billionaire

banking and oil heir atop the Philanthropy 50, The Chronicle's annual ranking of the 50 Americans who donated the most to charity last year. (See the entire list.) The two foundations each received \$369.4 million. They are organizations Mr. Scaife had led for decades: the Allegheny Foundation, which supports charities chiefly in western Pennsylvania, and the Sarah Scaife Foundation, which largely funds conservative and libertarian public-policy groups.

The Scaife gifts were not the only new money flowing to foundations that charities can tap in the years ahead. About \$2 billion of the \$7 billion contributed by the 50 top donors went to philanthropies that will give the money away.

Others at the Top

The second-most generous donor from 2015 was the late John Santikos, head of a large Texas movie-theater chain, who gave an estimated \$605 million from his estate to the San Antonio Area Foundation.

Rounding out the Philanthropy 50 top five were financial-news king and potential 2016 presidential contender Michael Bloomberg (\$510 million in giving); New York financier John Paulson and his wife, Jenny (\$400 million); and eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife, Pam (\$327 million).

Other notable donors of 2015 included:

Walmart heirs Alice Walton (No. 7 on the list), Jim Walton (tied for No. 25), and Robson Walton (tied for No. 25), who collectively donated \$407 million in company stock.

Bill and Melinda Gates (No. 6), who gave \$272 million to their foundation. Last year, the Gateses topped the list, giving \$1.9 billion.

Entrepreneur Jay Faison (No. 12), who donated \$165.6 million to his ClearPath Foundation to promote clean-energy efforts and green-energy business opportunities and to raise the issue of climate change among conservatives and centrists.

J.B. and M.K. Pritzker (No. 20), who contributed \$101 million to Northwestern University. The couple is part of the wealthy Pritzker family, known for its Hyatt hotel chain, but this is the first appearance on the Philanthropy 50 by any member of the clan.

Roberta Buffett Elliott (No. 21), who gave \$100.9 million to Northwestern. The sister of investment guru Warren Buffett is an alumna of the university.

'A Return to the Norm'

While Silicon Valley has been touted in recent years as the future of big-time giving, New York made a strong showing in the Philanthropy 50. Four of the top 10 donors last year were from the New York metropolitan area.

Overall, giving by the 50 most-generous donors in the United States dropped more than 30 percent in 2015, with gifts from tech moguls contracting sharply.

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In a year of dramatic stock-market swings, the total donated by these individuals or couples reached just \$7 billion, the lowest mark since 2010. Giving by the biggest philanthropists from the tech industry dropped to \$1.3 billion from the staggering \$5 billion donated in 2014.

Several factors contributed to the decline, including natural fluctuations of the list. Each year since 2010 has seen an enormous gift that inflated the Philanthropy 50 total. In 2014, there were two: the estimated \$1 billion that Buffalo Bills owner Ralph Wilson left to his foundation upon his death, and a \$1.9 billion gift from the Gateses to their foundation.

Some data suggest that megagift philanthropy remained strong last year. Median giving by the Philanthropy 50 in 2015 was \$91 million, just under 2014's figure of \$92.5 million.

Robert Kissane, president of the nonprofit-consulting firm CCS, said 2015 continued a strong run for institutions working with the wealthiest individuals. "We saw similar giving at the highest levels — the \$25 million, \$50 million, and \$100 million levels — as we have seen in the last few years," he said. "2013, 2014, and 2015 have been very good."

Ann Limberg, head of philanthropic solutions at U.S. Trust, also said she saw little change last year in commitments or giving by the bank's high-wealth clients. "The drop in 2015 could just be a signal of a return to the norm," she said.

Some observers raised the possibility that Wall Street volatility may have dampened the confidence that can inspire donors to make megagifts. The Dow Jones and Standard and Poor's indices each fell for the first time since 2008's stock-market collapse.

Emmett Carson, CEO of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, said 2015's stock-market woes were likely to blame for the reduced giving from the tech industry's heaviest hitters. "For potential tech donors, the flat market in 2015 meant that there were fewer initial public offerings, mergers and acquisitions," he said in an email.

Kathleen McCarthy, director of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, says the decline may also reflect the increasing number of wealthy individuals turning to philanthropic vehicles outside of charity.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, for instance, are not included on the Philanthropy 50 despite committing \$45 billion to "improving this world for the next generation," as they announced on Facebook in December. The couple will fulfill their pledge through a limited-liability corporation, which means much of their charitable spending will not be subject to disclosure and payout requirements and can go toward for-profit ventures.

"A lot of money is being diverted into new forms of philanthropy," Ms. McCarthy says. "Lines between sectors are blurring."

Heightened Scrutiny

Though big gifts often draw criticism as well as praise, unease about the country's growing inequality appeared to focus even more scrutiny on donors' intentions and dollars in 2015. Mr. Zuckerberg and Dr. Chan were questioned for their decision to use a limited-liability corporation. And a small firestorm erupted over Mr. and Ms. Paulson's \$400 million gift to Harvard University, which has the largest endowment in higher education. Critics argued the hedge-fund manager was attempting to burnish his image by donating a headline-grabbing sum to an elite institution.

Those who believe the uber-wealthy could do more good with their fortunes will find ammunition in 2015's Philanthropy 50. The 23 Forbes billionaires on the list gave to charity an average of less than 1 percent of their estimated wealth. [See "The Rich List."] Of the 23, former hedge-fund manager John Arnold (No. 13) and his wife, Laura, parted with the biggest chunk of their fortune — 5.6 percent of an estimated net worth of \$2.9 billion.

Such one-year snapshots can be misleading. The Gateses, for example, gave away only 0.4 percent of their \$76 billion fortune last year. But they have made gifts of \$1 billion or more to their foundation several times in the past 15 years.

'Big Bets' for Good

About \$2 billion of the donations by Philanthropy 50 donors in 2015 went to foundations. Mr. Gates, Mr. Bloomberg, Mr. Omidyar, and others often fund foundations or organizations they control that aim to do good in areas such as health, education, the environment, and civic well-being.

Others on the list gave directly to charities in such areas. Marc Benioff (No. 40), founder of cloud-computing company Salesforce.com, and his wife, Lynne, gave more than \$20 million to organizations helping the disadvantaged, including San Francisco General Hospital, which serves the city's poorest patients. Silicon Valley angel investor Ron Conway (No. 46) and his wife, Gayle, made gifts ranging from \$5,000 to \$1 million to 42 nonprofits nationwide. The couple supports efforts to stop gun violence and gives to groups that help the homeless.

The nonprofit Bridgespan Group, which recently studied philanthropic "big bets," identified several gifts of \$10 million or more directed by Philanthropy 50 donors at sparking social change. Among the biggest was the bequest by Mr. Santikos, who died last year at 87. A Greek immigrant, he had amassed his wealth leading a family cinema chain started in the early 1900s, when his father opened a nickelodeon. In the years before his death, Mr. Santikos established a fund at the San Antonio Area Foundation, through which his bequest will support groups and causes. These include organizations working with the needy and groups providing health care and doing medical research.

Another social change "big bet": a \$125 million bequest to a charity for the blind from a stranger who had never given the group a dime. Seattle insurance executive Donald Sirkin (No. 15), who apparently was losing his sight before his death at 86, directed the bulk of his estate to the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Other 2015 gifts of note:

\$70 million from Audrey Irmes (No. 31) to the Audrey Irmes Foundation for Social Justice. The gift represents the proceeds from the sale of a Cy Twombly painting by Mrs. Irmes, a prolific art collector. Mrs. Irmes told The Chronicle she was eating dinner one night last year and looking at

Mr. Twombly's 1968 "blackboard" painting, which hung in her dining room. "I thought, I have enjoyed this picture for so many years, and now it's time for that picture to leave me and do some good," she said. "It's like one of my children; it was leaving home to do some good, and I'm very proud of it."

Although the 86-year-old philanthropist directed \$30 million from the sale to the Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles for an events center, her foundation mostly supports aid projects in Africa and programs for Los Angeles youths and families in need.

\$40 million by Michael and Marian Ilitch (No. 47) to Wayne State University. The pledge by the Little Caesars Pizza founders toward a new business-school building is part of a three-year, Ilitch-led effort to revitalize 50 blocks north of downtown Detroit called the District Detroit. The area, to be anchored by the new arena for the Detroit Red Wings, the National Hockey League team owned by the Ilitches, will feature housing, retail, and other commercial space and a new headquarters for Little Caesars.

The couple, who both grew up in Detroit, said they are convinced that providing young people with educational and entrepreneurial opportunities will help the city thrive. "We're seeing students choose to stay here in Detroit, joining our work force and become leaders in the making," Mr. Ilitch told The Chronicle. "It's a place our young people are choosing to live, work, and spend their time, and it reminds us of what Detroit has been and the incredible potential it's now realizing once again."

The Complete List

Subscribers also have access to details about each donor, their gifts, the causes they support, and access to every list since 2000.

Rank	Donor	Total donated
1	Richard Mellon Scaife	\$758,866,026
2	John Santikos	\$605,000,000
3	Michael Bloomberg	\$510,000,000
4	John and Jenny Paulson	\$400,000,000
5	Pierre and Pam Omidyar	\$327,000,000
6	Bill and Melinda Gates	\$272,000,000
7	Alice Walton	\$224,775,000
8	David Geffen	\$200,000,000
8	Stephen and Christine Schwarzman	\$200,000,000
10	David Koch	\$192,000,000

11	Jack Taylor	\$187,796,750
12	Jay Faison	\$165,599,943
13	John and Laura Arnold	\$162,500,000
14	Louis Simpson and Kimberly Querrey	\$136,500,000
15	Conrad T. Prebys	\$125,000,000
15	Donald Sirkin	\$125,000,000
17	Paul G. Allen	\$113,000,000
18	Ernest and Evelyn Rady	\$112,000,000
19	Ruth Bedford	\$104,000,000
20	J.B. and M.K. Pritzker	\$101,000,000
21	David Elliott and Roberta Buffett Elliott	\$100,900,000
22	Ranjan and Chandrika Tandon	\$100,045,000
23	Marion Anderson	\$100,000,000
23	Gordon and Betty Moore	\$100,000,000
25	Jim Walton	\$91,125,000
25	Robson Walton	\$91,125,000
27	David Rubenstein	\$85,870,000
28	David and Dana Dornsife	\$85,350,000
29	Irwin and Joan Jacobs	\$82,330,000
30	Gerry and Marguerite Lenfest	\$80,000,000
31	Audrey Irmas	\$70,000,000
32	Ray and Barbara Dalio	\$65,000,000
33	Jan Koum	\$64,200,000
34	Mark and Mary Stevens	\$61,000,000
35	John and Rosemary Brown	\$59,037,500
36	Myrtle Woldson	\$56,000,000
37	Stuart Miller and family	\$55,000,000
38	Ray Dolby	\$52,600,000
39	Herbert and Nicole Wertheim	\$52,000,000

40	Marc and Lynne Benioff	\$50,478,939
41	Albert and Nancy Nicholas	\$50,000,000
41	Dwight and Martha Schar	\$50,000,000
41	Andrew Viterbi	\$50,000,000
44	Lawrence Ellison	\$49,500,000
45	Howard and Julie Lerner Levine	\$45,700,000
46	Ronald and Gayle Conway	\$43,485,250
47	Michael and Marian Ilitch	\$40,000,000
48	Richard Corbett	\$35,000,000
49	William and Weslie Janeway	\$32,600,000
49	John Luth and Joanne Chouinard-Luth	\$32,600,000

Send an email to Maria Di Mento and Drew Lindsay.
