



*Washington County Community Foundation
Philanthropist of the Year Award*

2006 Recipients- Charles & Carol Keller

The following article, written by Michael Bradwell, was published in the Observer Reporter on November 13, 2007.



For Charles and Carol Keller, becoming members of Rotary International wasn't just making a commitment to providing charitable service

around the world. The organization also brought them together, albeit after a long friendship.

The Kellers, who reside in California but soon will move to Washington, have been named *Philanthropists of the Year* by the Washington County Community Foundation. The couple will be honored at a banquet Saturday at Hilton Garden Inn at Southpointe.

Friends of the Kellers describe a couple who have worked tirelessly in a myriad of local, and even international, charitable efforts. "Chuck is kind of like the Energizer Bunny, he just keeps going," said his friend, fellow Rotarian and WCCF board member Ken Donahue of California, who worked with Keller on a fund-raising campaign for Center in the Woods, a senior citizens center in California.

After a lifetime of giving, Keller, 83, said he believes that the act is closely related to that of saving money, a habit he learned while growing up. He noted that his father, who rose to become chairman of the English department at California University of Pennsylvania, always was able to save money "even when he was teaching at ungraded schools and working as a part-time telegrapher for the railroad."

On the giving side, Keller said, people shouldn't allow themselves to be intimidated by a word whose implications are expansive.

"Philanthropy is a scary word," Keller said. "It

means 'loving mankind.'" But the meaning also frees one from thinking that the act of giving to favorite causes is limited to contributing just money, he added. "It's not just for the wealthy. I think philanthropy is for everybody who is of a giving nature," said Keller. "They can also give their time, talent and effort, as well as money."

Keller understands how expansive a person's commitment to philanthropy can become. He has served as president of Rotary International, the Washington County Easter Seal Society, Mon Valley United Way, Mon Valley Hospital, Mon Valley Health and Welfare Council, Washington County Bar Association, Pennsylvania Bar Association and California Area Chamber of Commerce, and served on a number of boards.

So what is Keller's favorite charity? "It's the one I'm writing the check for at the particular time," he said, adding that he and his wife give to their church, California United Methodist Church; his alma mater, Cal U.; Center in the Woods; Jumonville Foundation; Rotary and a number of other agencies.

Keller credits attendance at a Rotary district conference meeting in Johnstown in 1951 for his chance encounter with the late Ralph Peacock, a Washington attorney. "It literally changed my life; it was pure accident," Keller said, adding that as a young attorney, he was asked by Peacock if he would help him with some legal projects. The two men eventually formed Peacock Keller & Ecker LLP, which grew to become one of the region's largest law firms outside of Pittsburgh.

The organization also made Keller, a World War II Army Air Forces pilot who retired from the U.S. Air Force as a judge advocate, change his views of how peace should be earned.

"Rotary's favorite cause is that of peace-building," Keller said. "I've had a chance to travel the world and see the needs of people throughout the world," he said. "I've helped people who don't know me, and I don't know them, but their needs are so overwhelming. "War is simply an unacceptable way of resolving our disputes, and we must find a more sustainable path to peace."

Rotary also brought Chuck and Carol Keller together after both were widowed. While becoming more active in Rotary International in the mid-1960s, they and their previous spouses became good friends. Chuck and Carol were married Nov. 5, 1999.

Carol, 73, who worked for 12 years as a surgical nurse at Presbyterian Hospital in Pittsburgh, became involved in Rotary, the American Heart Association and other charities in Butler County.

While the couple will receive a fund in their name as part of WCCF's *Philanthropist of the Year* Award, they plan on taking a somewhat different approach to its use. Chuck, a founding member of WCCF, said the fund will be used to support the administrative needs of the foundation so that it may continue to grow its grant-making endowment. WCCF, which began in 1996, recently surpassed \$3 million in its grant-making endowment. "It's not as popular a subject to provide operational money to

the foundation," Keller acknowledged. "But you've got to protect the machinery of the foundation, (particularly) if you accept the idea that the foundation is the vehicle to make good things happen."

Donahue, who is North American president of Rose Plastics in California, said Keller's longtime involvement in charitable work has made him aware of the need for strong administration. "Chuck's been involved in many campaigns to raise money, so he knows it's very difficult to raise money for people and to control the ongoing operational expenses," Donahue said.

"That's Charlie Keller," added John Campbell, a WCCF board member and longtime acquaintance of Keller's. "He's been involved in philanthropy and doing for others for so long that he understands that you have to keep the infrastructure going. It's not as warm and fuzzy as making a gift to be used as a charitable endowment, but in essence, he's helping them all."

Keller said he and his wife hope their decision will help others decide to get past that "scary word" and enter the world of giving. "We want to encourage other people to consider philanthropy," he said. "We're always on the lookout to make it easier for people to do good things."