



CHAPTER SEVEN

LAUNCHING THE ANDRUS FAMILY PHILANTHROPY PROGRAM

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE

The four members of the Family Involvement Committee had taken on a monumental job and, to their credit, they achieved their major objectives. In just 18 months, the committee, in collaboration with the Surdna board and staff, had created the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program, a network encompassing all the family's philanthropic institutions and educational activities. It had designed the Andrus Family Fund for younger family members and recruited candidates through intensive outreach efforts that included the January 30th and "Philanthropy 101" informational meetings. New family members were already serving on the boards of the Homes and, after a thorough search involving the use of a search firm, the committee had selected an outstanding executive director to head the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program/Andrus Family Fund. Throughout the 18 months, the committee held close to 30 conference calls, prepared detailed reports for quarterly meetings of the Surdna board, and kept the extended family apprised of its activities. The work was demanding and the pace sometimes fatiguing but with its goals met and its previously unimagined solutions now institutionalized realities, the committee members felt a well-earned pride in their accomplishments.

"It was a lot of work," says Larry Griffith, "but it wasn't an onerous task. We wanted to do it. When the Family Involvement Committee was formed, we didn't have the wisdom to end up where we did. None of us realized how much of a difference our work would make. Not only have we created new opportunities for family members through the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program and the Andrus Family Fund, but our work has also ignited interest for things happening in the family."

The future of the Family Involvement Committee—indeed, whether it ought to have a future—had not been discussed by the Surdna board. In fact, the trustees had never put in writing the committee's status or its official duties. The committee submitted a memo to the board asking that it name the Family Involvement Committee a formal standing committee of the board and that it clarify its charge to the committee regarding its future

responsibilities. The board moved that the Family Involvement Committee should continue as an ad hoc committee until February 2002 when its purpose will be reviewed. In the meantime, the committee would continue to act as a liaison between the Surdna board and the staff of the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program. It would also continue to nominate family members to the boards.

GETTING STARTED

In February 2000, Steve Kelban assumed the position of executive director of the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program and the Andrus Family Fund. Two months later, the board of the Andrus Family Fund held its first retreat. Libby Andrus, the current chair of the Surdna Foundation, set the tone for the Andrus Family Fund in her message to the new board, a challenge that young family board members are unaccustomed to hearing from the older generation: the Surdna board wants you to make us uncomfortable.

“If the younger family members had come directly onto the Surdna board,” says Libby, “they would have had to adjust to an established culture. What’s exciting about the Andrus Family Fund is that the board members can create their own culture and determine their own direction. We don’t want them to do things exactly as the Surdna board does. If they simply followed in our footsteps, we wouldn’t succeed in our mission. We want the young family members to challenge our thinking, to make us look at our own process. We want to learn from them.”

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For the Surdna trustees, the launching of the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program and the Andrus Family Fund was a time to stand back and enjoy the fruits of their labor. In Edie’s words: “The Andrus Family Philanthropy

Program and the Andrus Family Fund are an important legacy to the family. John Andrus started the foundation and the Children’s Home. His daughter, Helen Benedict was a strong leader of Surdna and established the Old Folk’s Home. John Andrus III brought Surdna into the 20th century when he hired a professional staff. And now John Andrus’ great-grandchildren are offering a whole new set of opportunities to our larger family and ensuing generations. There is more openness in our generation and a real concern about fairness and inclusivity. We are truly proud of what we planned.”

The launching of the new programs marked a milestone in the history of the Surdna Foundation. Just 15 years earlier, Waldemar Nielsen had called the Surdna Foundation “persistently sluggish” and its accomplishments, at best, mediocre. Now the foundation had created a groundbreaking program for educating and engaging a large family in philanthropy and community service, a program that has the potential for taking family foundations into a new frontier. “If Waldemar Nielsen were to write about the Surdna Foundation today,” says Sam Thorpe, “I think he’d say that we are one of the better family foundations around.”

HEARING FROM THE NEW BOARD MEMBERS

By the end of the year 2000, the new members of the Children's Home and the Old Folk's Home had been serving on those boards for a year and the eight members of the Andrus Family Fund board were jump-starting their fund. To the surprise of the older generation, the new members were spending more time on board-related tasks than they or the Surdna board ever imagined they could handle. Given all the concerns about the time constraints on the younger generation, it was instructive to hear from the new board members themselves about why had they chosen to serve at this stage of their lives and what serving on the boards meant to them.

For many, the opening of the doors to the family philanthropies was, in itself, an attraction. They had attended the January 30th meeting out of curiosity, never thinking that they actually had a chance to serve on a board. As Kate Downes put it, "I thought you had to be a family big shot to serve on the boards." The presentations by the Surdna trustees, however, convinced the attendees that not only would qualified blood relatives have a chance to serve but that their spouses would, too. That invitation took Kate's husband, Ken Downes, by surprise; he thought that he had been invited to the meeting only to accompany his wife. The possibility of serving on a board had particular appeal to Ken, an ordained clergyman. "I'm in my late thirties," says Ken, "and making that middle-aged shift to thinking about mission and purpose in life. Kate and I had recently decided to make financial sacrifices so that we could work on projects we felt passionate about. Serving on the Andrus Family Fund board was a good fit for this time of my life and a natural extension of my training."

Others responded to the warm and enthusiastic tone of the letters they received from the committee and the plans the committee had in store for the younger family members. Those who attended the January meeting were further persuaded that the broad welcome and invitation to serve was genuine. The fourth generation had stressed that they wanted the fifth generation to join them as active partners in carrying on the family legacy and that they wanted to hear their thoughts on how to make this new venture succeed. Later, when the younger family members saw that their ideas and suggestions had actually been incorporated into the plans for the Andrus Family Family Philanthropy Programs and the Andrus Family Fund, they had further evidence that they were being taken seriously. Edie's personal notes and follow-up phone calls to those who attended the January meeting generated more good feelings. "Edie provided the friendly face, the voice on the telephone," Caitlin Hawkins. "She showed us that the Surdna board would be accessible to us."

Although the Andrus family had been holding Concinities for the past 25 years, their numbers made it difficult for cousins from the different branches to get to know one another well. That was particularly true for the fifth-generation. At the January 30th meeting, however, the cousins learned that they were connected by more than blood. "Even though we had grown up in different parts of the country and some of us had never met before," says Peter Benedict, "we discovered that we shared the same values and many of the same interests. After meeting my cousins, the idea of working with my family toward a common goal and for a common good was very appealing to me. It was also my chance to carry on the legacy of my great-grandmother, Helen Benedict."

The commitment to carrying on the family's philanthropic legacy was particularly strong among fifth-generation family members whose parents served on the family boards. That was the case for Larry Griffith's son Cameron and his daughter Melinda. "The work of the Surdna Foundation and the Children's Home are a huge source of pride for my father," says Melinda, "and it was a big part of our lives. We saw how much it meant to him. When I attended the 70th anniversary celebration of the Children's Home and saw what they were doing, I felt that I could make a contribution working on the board. My daughter is only two years old and it's hard for me to make all the meetings, but I don't want to miss this opportunity to be involved."

The desire to contribute to society and to improve the lives of others was a common theme among fifth-generation family members who applied to serve on the boards. Tim Thorpe, Edie's stepson, sees serving on the Andrus Family Fund board as an opportunity to make a major contribution that he could never make on his own or with his own money. And Ann Williams says that being on the new board has already expanded her horizons. "There's something strengthening about working with the family and feeling part of a greater community. It opens up possibilities for what we can do together, and it makes what I can do in my own community seem more real."

Some chose to serve on a Homes' boards because their professional training or volunteer experience dovetailed with the focus of the institution. Kate Downes, an attorney with a specialty in elder law, joined the board of the Old Folk's home, and Caroline Andrus brought her experience from serving on two school boards to the Children's Home board. Those attracted to serving on the Andrus Family Fund, however, expressed the same motivation: they saw it as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to influence the direction of a new fund and to create a legacy for future generations. "There are no parameters," said Cameron

Griffith. "It's very exciting to start from scratch and to create something new. I didn't know most of my cousins from different branches, so getting to know them through a project like this was also a big draw."

I don't think I'd feel the same deep meaning from this work if I weren't doing it with my cousins and as part of the larger Andrus family.

Serving on an Andrus family board requires a major time commitment, something that is not easy for any of the new family members to manage. Yet, all are aware that they have been offered an exceptional opportunity that they

cannot let pass by. The satisfaction of making a contribution is heightened all the more by doing it with family members. "Serving on the Andrus Family Fund has allowed me to integrate a part of my life never integrated before," says Ann Williams. "I don't think I'd feel the same deep meaning from this work if I weren't doing it with my cousins and as part of the larger Andrus family."



ASSESSMENT

Although the Surdna Foundation is over 80 years old, its board has only functioned as an active working board since 1990. In that light, its achievement in conceiving, developing, and implementing projects as ambitious as the Andrus Family Fund and the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program—and doing it in less than two years—is even more impressive. When asked to identify the key factors contributing to the success of the project, those interviewed mentioned the following:

A MOTIVATED COMMITTEE

The four members of the Family Involvement Committee—Edie Thorpe, Larry Griffith, Peter Benedict, and Sam Thorpe—were unwavering in their commitment to the committee’s mission. During the entire 18-month process, no one missed a conference call or came up short on an assignment. Their optimism and open-mindedness created a momentum that carried the process forward and to a place that none had imagined when they began. The joy of working together in a creative process also built a special camaraderie among the committee members. “We felt that we were doing important work,” says Peter. “We were creating a model that would serve the family and serve the field, and that was very exciting to us.”

STRONG LEADERSHIP

As hardworking and harmonious as the committee was, it could not have accomplished as much and as quickly without Edie’s leadership. Her combination of organizational skills, perseverance, and caring were the keys to the committee’s success. “Edie was the force behind the committee,” says Ed. “You need someone to move the process along, and Edie was the one who did it. She was determined to make it happen. She kept track of everything and kept everyone on track. The family involvement project was one of the best executed pieces of work this foundation has ever done.”

PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE

Although Edie had the right personality and skills for the job, she lacked the experience to lead a project of this magnitude on her own. From the start, she turned to professionals for guidance. “Our committee’s work was greatly enriched by the professionalism of Judy Healey, Ed Skloot, and Dara Major,” says Edie. “They challenged us, educated us and, most of all, supported us in innumerable ways.”

Judy Healey worked most closely with the committee throughout the planning process. Beyond instructing the committee in the mechanics of planning, she guided the committee’s thinking about the process. “Judy put the committee’s ideas into a form that enabled the committee to go forward,” says Libby Andrus. “She asked the right questions, provided the framework for their thinking, and broadened the discussions by bringing new ideas and adding another point of view. It was imperative for the success of the project to have an outside consultant as part of the team.”

CAREFUL PLANNING

Key to the committee’s steady progress was its careful, deliberate planning. Before moving ahead, it fully explored possible consequences of each proposal. For every phase of the project, it spelled out specific goals and outcomes, outlined responsibilities and criteria for key players, defined lines of authority, listed tasks, and set timelines for the duration of the project.

COMPLEMENTARY SKILLS

Edie’s and Judy’s complementary strengths added to the committee’s effectiveness. Judy’s intuitive, conceptual approach was balanced by Edie’s attention to details. Edie contributed knowledge of the family and its history, and Judy brought her knowledge of nonprofit organizations and family foundations. The two worked closely together, each benefiting from the other’s talents and skills.

TRANSPARENCY

From its launching at the Ojai retreat, the family involvement effort was a model of collaboration. The Family Involvement Committee took the lead in planning but, at each step, it consulted with the board, integrating their thoughts into the design. The principles of openness and inclusiveness—which, after all, were the driving forces of the project itself—guided the committee’s communications with the board, staff, and family. The January 30th meeting, the “Philanthropy 101,” and the letters sent to the extended family marked a new level of communication with the extended family. “We didn’t want any surprises,” says Larry Griffith. “We wanted everyone to know what was going on and to feel part of the process at each step along the way.”

FOLLOW-THROUGH

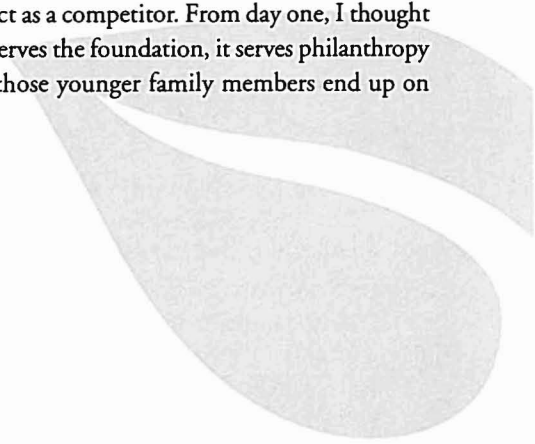
Expanding family involvement might have remained another good idea had the board continued only to talk about it. Instead, it took action, forming the Family Involvement Committee and seeing the project through to completion. “You can’t just dream up ideas and assume they’ll happen,” says Ed Skloot. “That’s the Achilles heel of every institution. It may sound like pabulum to say it, but intention has to be matched with implementation. You have to have a plan and follow it all the way to the end—something Edie is great at.”

TRUST

The Surdna board placed its trust in the young family members to design their own program and challenged them only to outshine their elders. “That’s a wonderful message,” says Steven Kelban, “and it is what attracted me to working with the Andrus Family Fund. The Surdna trustees really want the younger generation to make this Fund their own. That’s a very healthy thing for an older generation to do—to take parental pleasure in watching the younger generation become independent.”

PROFESSIONALISM

The hallmark of the family involvement effort was its standard of professionalism. When the board decided to house the Andrus Family Fund in the offices of the Surdna Foundation, it recognized that just as the arrangement had the potential to be mutually beneficial, it could just as easily breed competition between the two staffs. That was a concern of Steve Kelban, too, when he interviewed for the job of executive director. Wouldn’t Ed Skloot see him as encroaching on his territory, and wouldn’t he resent the board taking money from the Surdna budget to give to the Andrus Family Fund? And, furthermore, would the independence of the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program be protected in that setting? “Those were logical questions to raise,” says Ed. “The board, committee and I had many conversations about how the new programs would fit into the existing structure. I was included in the process from the start. Nothing was hidden. I never saw this project as a competitor. From day one, I thought it was a terrific idea: It serves the family, it serves the foundation, it serves philanthropy and, one day, it will serve me if some of those younger family members end up on the Surdna board.





CONCLUSION

Family Concinnities have been a tradition in the Andrus family for the past 25 years. A record 237 family members representing eight branches and four generations from across the country attended the 1999 Concinnity. That a family this size continues to meet—and that attendance at the reunions continues to grow—indicates the importance the Andrus family places on maintaining family ties.

Building on bonds strengthened at the Concinnities, the Surdna board set out to connect family members through another family tradition: philanthropy and community service. By making education and training the aim of the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program, the trustees moved beyond conventional thinking about succession planning. Instead of preparing family members to be grantmakers only, they would prepare them to be good citizens in their home communities.

The Andrus Family Philanthropy Program will be the primary source of information exchange. Using print and electronic media, it will keep family members up-to-date on the activities of the family's philanthropies as well as on community service projects in which family members are involved. Family members will educate one another about their particular interests, perhaps encouraging some family members to join together in working on projects or helping family members to establish similar projects in another community. Family members in the same region who share similar interests may also want to organize informational meetings for themselves or other members of their community or, more ambitiously, host meetings on the Internet for the entire family.

In creating the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program, the Surdna trustees have broadened the definition of succession planning. Preparing family members to sit on foundation boards involves more than teaching them about trustee responsibilities or grantmaking practices. It requires cultivating in young family members a concern about the state of the world based on education and community service. Today, new technologies offer family foundations a myriad of avenues for connecting and educating family members. The Andrus Family Philanthropy Program offers a model for exploiting those opportunities.



EPILOGUE

The Andrus Family Fund got off to a running start with its retreat in the spring of 2000. By year's end, the board had agreed on its mission and program areas and drawn up the guidelines (bylaws) for the Andrus Family Fund.

The mission statement defines three challenges the board set for itself:

- 1) As leaders in a next generation family fund, we challenge ourselves to respect the tradition and philanthropic values of our family as we explore new perspectives and innovative models for giving;
- 2) As individuals who have come of age in a world still unsafe for many, we challenge ourselves to collaborate with those working to create safer environments, whether physical, emotional, or psychological;
- 3) As board members of the Andrus Family Fund, we challenge ourselves to contribute to the body of knowledge and experience about what is necessary to create and sustain effective social change. We will do this by focusing on transitions—those critical junctures in time and process—that, if properly attended to, effect positive change.

The Andrus Family Fund board selected the overarching theme of transitions to provide a framework for its thinking about the Fund's mission and goals. Within that framework, it selected two program areas for initial exploration:

- 1) the transition from foster care to independence, and
- 2) community reconciliation, which explores how communities can acknowledge past wrongs and begin a healing process. The AFF Board believes, "one vital factor in creating successful social change is honoring the emotional and psychological effects of the change process. Therefore, we will focus our grantmaking around this factor, while seeking to educate others about the relationship between external change and internal transitions."

The board members apply the theme of transitions to themselves as well. As the first members of the Andrus Family Fund, they are the transitional board from one system to another and from one group of cousins to another. In that spirit, the board has

already established a Youth Service Program to foster community involvement in sixth-generation family members between the ages of 12 and 15. Each young person in the program will be mentored by an Andrus Family Fund board member. Furthermore, each will receive a small grant, perhaps \$500 to \$1,000, to donate to organizations in his or her community. Because of geographical limitations, the primary tool for teaching the young people how to research organizations will be the Internet.

The blending of goals of the Andrus Family Family Philanthropy Program and the Andrus Family Fund is also evident in another innovative program the board created: Board Exploration Triads (BETs). The BETs are small study groups composed of an Andrus Family Fund board member, an extended Andrus family member, and an expert in an area related to the Andrus Family Fund's program. The primary goal of the BETs is to give participants a deeper, multi-faceted understanding of the Fund's program areas. A secondary goal is to draw extended family members into the philanthropic circle. The Andrus Family Fund board expects to organize eight BETs to run simultaneously for eight months. At the end of that time, the individual BETs will come together to share what they have learned as a group.

As executive director of the Andrus Family Family Philanthropy Program and the Andrus Family Fund, Steve Kelban has the responsibility to steer both programs simultaneously. With a mandate to link family members through an ongoing communications system, he is preparing to set up two Web sites—one for the Andrus Family Fund and the other for the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program—and a list serve for the Youth Service Program. Additionally, this past December, the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program published its inaugural newsletter, aptly named Concinnity. Besides presenting information about national community service opportunities, the newsletter includes interviews with family members discussing their public service experiences. Several extended family members contributed articles and interviews with family members, achieving two aims of the newsletter: getting new family members involved in the family's philanthropies and introducing them to one another through the interviews.

By any standard, the first-year accomplishments of the Andrus Family Fund and the Andrus Family Philanthropy Program are impressive. The dynamic between Steve Kelban and the Andrus Family Fund board has generated excitement, hard work, and focused learning, and they deserve full credit for their achievements. The role of the Surdna board, however, was also crucial. It set the stage for the success of the new programs by opening the doors of the family's philanthropies to new ideas, different approaches, and greater inclusiveness. The Surdna trustees made the offer in good faith, the extended family members acted on it, and the results speak for themselves.