

Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation Donor Legacy Statement

A Legacy for the Future

This Donor Legacy Statement attempts to communicate the original motivating forces for the establishment of the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation as an environmental foundation, the values and interests of the founding donors, and the lessons learned from the early years of the Foundation's operation to guide future stewardship and management of the Foundation. The motivations and values of Robert and Patricia Switzer are important touchstones when reviewing Foundation mission, strategy, programs and operations. This work is based on a series of interviews with Pat Switzer, family trustees and close colleagues of Robert Switzer and a review of Bob's Switzer's speeches and writings for the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation. We hope this summary will be of interest to Switzer Family members, current and future trustees, staff, Fellows and colleagues.

A brief history

The Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation was established by the donors in 1985 when the Day-Glo Color Corporation was sold. The company, founded by brothers Robert and Joseph Switzer, had grown from humble beginnings in Berkeley, California to industrial success with the brother's move to Cleveland to start the company in 1935. Later, their brother Fred Switzer also served the company, bringing his management skills to complement Bob's intense and pragmatic focus and Joe's creativity and innovation.

When the company was sold, Bob and Pat saw the establishment of the Foundation as an opportunity to give back some of their good fortune to society in a way they felt could make a lasting difference. For Bob especially, several critical events in his own life and success were to shape the form and focus of the foundation.

Bob's vision to offer financial support to environmental scholars was a reflection of the crucial importance in his life and career of a fellowship he received from the Scaife Foundation to attend The University of California at Berkeley to become a physician. Scaife Foundation support was especially critical for him when his college studies were derailed following a serious accident during the summer of his first year at school. His eyesight was badly damaged and a slow recuperation forced him to put his education on hold.

During Bob's recuperation, he and his brother Joe were experimenting in their father's pharmacy with naturally fluorescing compounds to produce "glow-in-the-dark" effects for Joe's magic shows. Serendipitously, these experiments resulted in discoveries that led to the first "day-glo" paints. When Bob returned to school he pursued his strong interest in science and chemistry to further develop these materials and ultimately to found the Day-Glo Paint Company with Joe.

The Scaife Fellowship had an enduring influence on Bob and rooted in him a belief that significant impact can be achieved by supporting promising individuals. The mentoring, network and financial support he received was a model for the fellowship program he would later create.

Solving environmental problems through leadership and scholarship

The Foundation's focus on environmental improvement was strongly influenced by the brothers' experience running a company with complex and often polluting manufacturing processes. This was at a time when environmental regulations, like the Clean Water Act, were just beginning to reflect society's growing awareness of the importance of environmental quality. Rather than fight the stricter standards for water pollution controls, they worked to improve their technology to reduce its environmental impact and water-borne contamination. Their greatest barrier to accomplishing these goals was a lack of sufficiently trained scientists and engineers capable of addressing the technical environmental problems the company faced. They supported innovation within the company, not only to produce better products but to create a sustainable system from an environmental management perspective, long before many other industries were thinking in these terms.

"A business lifetime spent in the manufacturing of chemicals and in close cooperation with many other industries in developing uses for our products, has given us a deep insight into man's ravaging of our environment and ecology. We've had intimate exposure over the years to many, many problems posed by the pollution of the air, water, lands and forests.

- Robert S. Switzer

Supporting graduate students in environmental sciences as a philanthropic strategy evolved from Bob's belief that industry and society need leaders in environmental fields who work on practical approaches to improving environmental quality. Bob's definition of environmental leadership included individuals who were problem-solvers and innovators dedicated to pursuing environmental goals and ideals.

Through his business experience, he understood the need to maintain natural systems while also repairing the harm already inflicted on the waters, land and air around us. In later years, through changes in environmental policy and practice at a national level, Bob and Foundation trustees came to realize that not only must technical solutions be sought for today's problems, but also that citizens must be educated to understand the vital importance of environmental quality and that individuals and organizations must advocate for policies that prevent harm in the future. The fields of activity supported by the foundation have expanded over the years but the theme of nurturing and supporting leadership by individuals who are dedicated environmental problem-solvers remains constant.

"We believe that there is and will continue to be a need for impact from highly skilled environmental scientists for both correction and prevention of further damage. These people must be fully dedicated to improvement rather than further destruction. They must be tough enough to withstand heavy pressures and controversies in order to do what is right rather than what is more profitable."

- Robert S. Switzer

Bob's early life experiences were the basis of his belief that rewarding a strong academic focus with direct financial and personal support enables individuals to reach their potential as leaders. Thus, the Switzer Environmental Fellowship Program was the first grantmaking program of the Foundation. Trustees wanted this Fellowship to be "prize" that is highly valued in terms of real dollars and credibility. To this day, the Fellowship embodies many of the motivating forces in Bob Switzer's personal and professional life and identified a continuing critical need - training individuals to address pressing environmental issues.

Family philanthropy – an exercise in values and management

Bob Switzer was at every personal and professional level, a leader. He always had a clear vision of where he wanted to go, guided and supported by careful research, analysis and evaluation. His efforts to set up the foundation were no different. He reached out to family members for their ideas for the foundation’s focus, which proved to be complementary to his own. He was determined to provide as effective leadership and management of this new organization as he had with his company.

Bob and his wife Patricia also saw the Foundation as a means of bringing their far-flung family together in a joint enterprise that would foster social good. While the Board was initially comprised of immediate family members, they always intended to bring in other branches of their families. With Pat Switzer’s support, the Board codified this intent in 2000 by opening board membership to all of Bob and Pat’s siblings and descendants as well as their own. Furthermore, they expressed their desire that family members would always welcome on the board and should be cultivated for their potential role as trustees of the Foundation.

Although Bob and Pat achieved the family participation they sought for the Foundation, Bob was also a pragmatist and believer in marshalling the best knowledge and resources available for the task at hand. This, too, translated into Board operation and practice. The Foundation Board now includes non-family members who bring the expertise necessary to run an effective organization from financial, legal, programmatic and operational perspectives. In fact, it was Bob’s hope, and that of subsequent trustees, that Switzer Fellows play an increasing role in

“One of Bob’s strong points was his ability to lead, to manage the work of others and to help them establish meaningful objectives. He developed a real interest in educating and training first the employees and ultimately when he got started with the Foundation, to do the same with family members. He had the ability to determine that something important needed doing, to sort out important needs, then gather people who could help him, and finally get the resources together to accomplish it. That was certainly a driving force in the early formation of the Foundation. It was a carry-over from the way he conducted our business. He was good at it, he had an outstanding analytical capability.”
- Fred Switzer

Foundation programs and, eventually, governance as trustees and staff. This vision reflects his desire to see the Fellows flourish as well as to have the organization grow and innovate to address the critical environmental issues of the day in the most effective ways possible. Who better to assist with that goal than those who have been supported to pursue that vision in their own lives and careers?

Current and past trustees agree that Bob would be proud to see what how effective the Foundation has become - as a prominent organization promoting environmental leadership development.

“One thing to remember is that he had so many opportunities to put money in different directions. But he chose this.”
- William Kent, Scaife Foundation Alumni Association

Bob’s fine attention to detail also dictated that the Foundation remain a “lean” organization with the greatest percentage of funds going directly to recipients rather than overhead. Even with investments in mentoring, networking and other Fellow services, the Foundation should exercise responsible fiscal management.

Values and Inspiration for the Future

Bob Switzer was a man of great integrity and conscience. He was a naturally generous, caring person who believed in helping people in need, and was concerned about pollution and environmental issues in Cleveland and elsewhere. He had an incredible ability to lead, was results-oriented and had a strong desire to give back that was fulfilled through the Foundation.

Family members and founding trustees shared Bob's vision to support environmental improvement and leadership and were especially supportive of the Fellowship Program both as a strategic program filling an important need and an effective honor to Bob's experience, values and desire to "give back". With Bob and Pat's support, the Board experimented with new program concepts, sought outside expertise when needed, and always kept an open mind about how to approach their goals.

"The most important personality trait of Bob's in terms of the future of the Foundation, is to keep in mind Bob's desire to see results. He didn't want to throw money at problems - it was important to him to highlight that he wanted to improve rather than merely preserve the quality of our environment. This was very important to him in everything that he did." - Shawna Switzer Saaty

The trustees hope to see the family stay involved with the foundation, and are pleased, as Bob would be, with the professionalism with which it is now run. The trustees hope that future boards will continue to evaluate for results, but also to innovate. They recall their own creative efforts as among the most enjoyable and interesting part of being on the board. The board should be willing to analyze and respond to unmet needs.

It will always be a challenge to identify leadership qualities of fellowship applicants on paper. Refining and improving that process should always be examined. While a focus on science was a core aspect of the Fellowship and foundation interests, this focus can expand as long as the concepts of sustainability and interdisciplinary thinking are enlisted to support people and projects that will develop practical solutions to environmental issues. These concepts reflect the qualities of Switzer Fellows and ways in which Bob ran his business and thought about issues.

"Initially Bob's focus for the fellowship was purely science. Over the years he realized you could spend a life studying one thing and not make any changes. Studying something alone was not going to make a change unless that person was enough of a leader to take what he was doing and bring it to the real world." - Marge Switzer

In terms of program design and priorities, the Switzer Environmental Fellowship and Leadership programs should always be considered, as long as there is a need, and as long as there are opportunities for Fellows to express their leadership.

The financial value of the fellowship, in real dollars relative to the original fellowship should be regularly evaluated so that it remains a "prize". Switzer Programs should use Fellows in the operations and governance of the Foundation, so that it can continue to involve and honor their experience as part of the living practice of the foundation. And finally, it is the intent that the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation continue in perpetuity.

"The most satisfying thing is helping people, that's what it's all about. Sending graduate students to school who are interested in the environment. After all, that's the most important thing, if we don't clean up the environment what else is there?" - Patricia Switzer