

Second-generation philanthropist: Strengthening community is key

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Giving back to the community was ingrained in Mark Cook from the very beginning. The second-generation **Palm Beach** philanthropist learned by following the example of his father, Edward Cook, who passed away in 2001.

“Everyone hopes they have a role model. I’m lucky mine was my father,” said Cook, 53.

One of the elder Cook’s passions was giving to Palm Beach Island Hospice Foundation. He also supported education, making contributions to schools he and his children attended. These are both traditions his son continues today.

“I feel good about the opportunity to continue doing work my father was doing and branching out in other places,” the **West Palm Beach** resident said.

About 12 years ago, Cook got involved with Palm Healthcare Foundation, a nonprofit that brings residents and leaders together to solve critical health care issues in Palm Beach County. Its priorities are diabetes education, brain health and family caregiving. Now a member of the finance committee, Cook has also served as chairman of the board.

“[The organization] has the ability to influence how underserved communities could gain access to health care needs in Palm Beach,” he said. “This type of programming is invaluable. It’s helping communities understand how to cooperate to obtain a shared goal.”

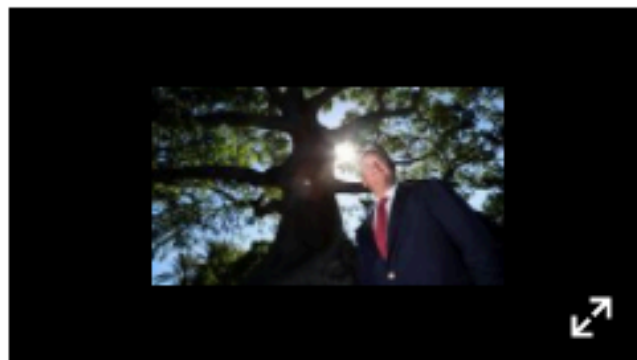
In addition to his volunteer work and financial contributions to Palm Healthcare Foundation, Cook gives his time and resources at Bethesda by the Sea Palm Beach County, Hospice Foundation of Palm Beach County, Hospice of Palm Beach County Foundation, Town of Palm Beach **United Way**, Max Planck Institute Foundation, Rehabilitation Center for Children & Adults, Palm Beach Civic Association, South Florida PBS and Rosarian Academy. He’s also a contributor at Flagler Museum and Palm Beach Historical Society.

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Cook is president of Royal Palm Management, a commercial property management firm in Palm Beach. Between his work, community involvement and three teenage daughters, Cook has a full plate.

"Sometimes you get it right. Sometimes you don't," he said. "It's not an eight-hour day. Sometimes you are overextended. You do these things with large groups of people. You rely on them more some days than others. It's that sense of community and creating shared visions and goals."

We asked Cook about his passion for charitable giving.



Mark Cook is a second-generation Palm Beach philanthropist involved in Palm Healthcare Foundation, Palm Beach Island Hospice Foundation, Town of Palm Beach United Way and several other nonprofits. (Amy Beth Bennett / Sun Sentinel)

What's the most rewarding part of giving back?

The way I feel. It makes me feel good and makes me happy.

What inspires you to give to the community?

I grew up under a concept that you have to have a healthy, vibrant community. You need performing arts, visual arts and a community to help those that are struggling. I was taught you were

supposed to be helpful.

You carried on your father's tradition. Do you hope your children do the same?

I hope once they are successful, they feel the same motivations to try to improve the communities they live in. I don't sense that this work ever stops. There is always an opportunity to identify a need, and to improve and enhance... You can't ever have too much education, too much culture and too much access. I hope they appreciate the priority I have assigned [to giving back] and can find a place for it in their lives.

Of the donations you've made, which do you feel will have the biggest impact on the community?

I just agreed to make a donation to Merrill and Bobby Debbs' charity Red Sneakers for Oakley. It helps raise awareness of food allergies. They lost a child to a food allergy. They are motivated to help share their experience and make certain it doesn't happen to anyone else.

To what do you wish you could donate more to help the community?

I'd donate more to our education and literacy programming. Rather than giving someone a fish, I'd rather teach everybody how to fish. I'd love to contribute to lifelong learning and improving people's language and coping skills.

You've turned your passion for giving into something that helps South Florida. What advice do you have for someone wanting to give back like you did?

Identify one or two organizations. Allocate the time, and figure out how you can fit in. Whether it is the giving of time, giving of money or just sharing your voice, all of it is important.