

## Inspirations for Living and Giving

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Chris McLeod is Executive Director of The Greater Charlotte Cultural Trust, a supporting foundation of Foundation For The Carolinas and ASC. An attorney with fifteen years of fundraising experience, Chris works with the ASC and its 24 cultural partners and their donors to build endowments through planned giving. Chris also serves as Chair for Leave A Legacy-Charlotte Region, a public awareness campaign dedicated to promoting the idea that everyone is capable of leaving a charitable bequest.

Thelda Hendrick, Suzanne Swearin, Lynn Kennelly and Nell Rose Bates: You won't find their names on the list of the Charlotte 500, the "who's who" of donors who have made major gifts to our community's best known charities. And yet each one of these women made generous bequests to her favorite nonprofits in the last three years.

Considering that less than 7% of Americans leave a charitable bequest<sup>1</sup>, by any measure, these women did something extraordinary. That these women earned a modest living makes their generous gestures even more inspiring given their charitable bequests ranged from \$160,000 to \$1.8 million.

Thelda Hendrick was a waitress at [Bridges Barbeque](#) in Shelby for 38 years. A divorced mother of three daughters, Thelda left over \$140,000 to five nonprofits, including \$60,000 to N.C. Baptist Men. In 1994, Thelda waited on a group of volunteers with N.C. Baptist Men who stopped at Bridges for a meal. They were doing relief work in Cleveland County after a tornado touched down in Boiling Springs.

Suzanne Swearin, a flight attendant who died of cancer in her early fifties, left over 90% of her estate to charity, including [North Carolina Dance Theatre](#), in honor of her close friends who introduced her to the art form. When accepting the Outstanding Legacy Award made to Suzanne posthumously on National Philanthropy Day in 2008, her brother joked that his sister would have laughed at the prospect of being honored as a "philanthropist" since she would have been hard pressed to even spell the word.

Lynn Kennelly, a sales channel professional with Hill-Rom, derived great joy and meaning through her volunteer work. Lynn died last September at the age of 50 from breast cancer. She left \$260,000 to five local nonprofits, including the first bequest ever received by The Charlotte Lesbian & Gay Fund, a collective giving program that supports nonprofits serving the lesbian and gay community.

And then there is Nell Rose Bates, a widow and retired CMS schoolteacher who left \$1.8 million to charity, including \$400,000 to her church Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian and \$1.4 million to [Foundation For The Carolinas](#) that will support affordable housing. According to a colleague, Nell's message to every child in her classroom was "you matter."

These women offer us the following lessons:

*We all have the opportunity to make a difference forever.* While all of these women earned a modest living, they each lived a life of service and left major gifts to charity. Still, each would likely have characterized her life as "richly blessed."

*Don't confuse wealth with a willingness to give.* Many people think that charitable bequests are made only by the likes of Warren Buffet and Bill Gates. Thelda, Suzanne, Lynn, and Nell provide us with powerful examples of how a person of modest means can make a difference for a community by making a charitable bequest.

*Bequests are often the largest gift a donor makes in his/her lifetime.* Nonprofit leaders need to consider the opportunity cost of planning silent auctions, hosting plant sales, and selling raffle tickets when they could be talking with their most loyal donors about how they could make a difference forever with a charitable bequest.

*Pay attention to women donors, particularly those who are divorced, widowed, or never married.* According to a Barclay's Wealth study, [Tomorrow's Philanthropist](#) (2009), women in the U.S. give an average of 3.5% of their wealth to charity, while men give an average of 1.8%.

*Consider defining your life's work and purpose more broadly than what you do to earn a living.* Each of these women defined their calling, purpose, and legacy in a way that was much broader than what they did for a living.

For a generation of boomers who characteristically define ourselves by what we do for a living, the lives of these women offer us many lessons in living and giving. Whether you serve banana pudding, pass out pretzels in First Class, or tell every child "you matter," everyone has the opportunity to make a difference forever. Thank you Thelda, Suzanne, Lynn, and Nell, for inspiring and challenging us to make a difference forever

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i. 2000 Survey of Donors National Committee of Planned Giving, now Partnership for Philanthropic Planning

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NAME: Suzanne Dane    DATE: Jun 23 2010 11:00AM

A thought-provoking column. Thanks, Chris, for shedding light on those who can make a difference but are rarely considered. It's so true that a person's passion may not be obvious, but it should always be encouraged.