

# Tearing down storehouses

How to leave a legacy and die broke | Warren Cole Smith

F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "Rich people are different from the rest of us." Ernest Hemingway wryly added: "Yes, they have more money."

Rich people who want to give away their wealth in their lifetimes have special problems. Bill Gates famously said, "Giving away billions of dollars without ruining the organizations you give to is not easy."

That's why a small industry has arisen to help Christian philanthropists give away their fortunes in ways that are consistent with their values, produce what they call "kingdom returns," and don't create a culture of dependence on the part of the ministries supported.

One such organization is Colorado Springs-based Excellence in Giving. Al Mueller, the president and founder, works with what he calls "high capacity families" to clarify their giving objectives and track the results. "We typically work with Christian families that can give away \$1 million or more per year," Mueller said.

The approach Mueller takes is to help his clients write what he calls a philanthropic mission statement, which identifies the family's "passions, purpose, and priorities."

"We encourage individuals and families not to be reactive givers, merely responding to incoming requests," Mueller said. "We help them proactively seek out projects and organizations [that] can help them accomplish the goals of their philanthropic mission statement." Mueller said that almost every wealthy family has a story to tell about giving money that failed to accomplish the donor's goals, and in some cases produced unintended consequences. A planned giving approach, Mueller believes, produces "greater joy for the giver, and more impact in the giving."

Paul Kuehner, a Connecticut Christian businessman, had set several goals for his family. He wanted "to give our money away while we were still alive, to help the poorest of the poor, and to teach our children how to be givers." Kuehner said that because there are many "relief organizations" that feed and clothe the poor, and even many Christian relief organizations, the task of finding the organizations whose work matched his family's values was daunting. Mueller and Excellence in Giving arranged what Kuehner called a "family mission trip to see the work of charities we were considering."

Excellence in Giving, and other philanthropy consulting agencies—including Atlanta-based Calvin Edwards & Company—do not work for free, nor do they raise money as charities themselves. Mueller said some of his dozen or so clients pay him a monthly retainer that covers ongoing research and follow-up. Others pay 1 percent of the total amount given away. "We receive no money from recipient organizations," Mueller said. "We work for the donors in a completely conflict-free arrangement." Calvin Edwards & Company typically doesn't work with retained relationships, but on a project-by-project basis.

Is the service worth the price? Kuehner says yes: "We would not have reached the charities we are now supporting without Al's experience. He did the front-end leg-work, and he is helping us make sure the money is being used in the ways we intended."

**Copyright © 2008 WORLD Magazine**

November 29, 2008, Vol. 23, No. 24