

## Support charities that stretch donations in best ways

Dick Hughes

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This is the time of year when paying some "bills" is enjoyable.

Those are the end-of-year checks that I write to local nonprofit groups.

Although I grew up in a relatively low-income family, philanthropy was ingrained in us. A minister, Dad would sometimes muse that we, too, could have had a boat or nice car had we not donated generously to our church and other charities.

I continue to believe that those donations are the better investment, as they contribute to an improved community and a heightened quality of life.

But where to target my donations so they do the most good? As someone who supports a number of charities, I focus on three criteria:

### Effectiveness

Salem Leadership Foundation is an excellent example, even though it's rarely in the public eye.

SLF brings people together to tackle neighborhood issues. Specifically, it strives to involve the faith community in addressing those needs, such as developing a neighborhood center for area residents or providing tutors and other volunteers for a neighborhood school.

As a naturally skeptical person, I'm not easily impressed. But SLF is the real deal: It's faith in action — serving people. It's focused on outcomes, not on generating publicity for itself. It's grass-roots and efficient instead of having a high overhead.

Last month, I challenged readers of this column to help SLF meet its \$60,000 end-of-year fund-raising goal. Thank you to everyone who has contributed; SLF is more than halfway toward its goal.

Frankly, I think SLF deserves even more support. I absolutely am convinced that the money will be used wisely and effectively. Whether you have one dollar to donate or several thousand,



WISE MEN 2009  
David Fitzsimmons, The Arizona Star.

### How to help

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to:

SALEM LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION: P.O.  
Box 7384, Salem, OR 97303;  
www.salemlf.org

ISAAC&#39;S ROOM/IKE BOX: 299 Cottage  
St. NE, Salem, OR 97301

HOGAR INFANTIL: PO Box 7049, Salem,  
OR 97303; www.hogarinfantil.org

I encourage you to embrace the Salem Leadership Foundation.

### **Low overhead**

Another example of low overhead is Isaac's Room, the parent organization of the Ike Box coffee shop and youth center in downtown Salem.

This year, the community generously supported the refurbishing of the former mortuary that has become the Ike Box. Individuals and companies provided more than \$50,000 in volunteer time and donations of materials. That shows how much the community believes in Isaac's Room, which serves at-risk youth.

The renovated building is a welcoming place — where people of all ages and backgrounds can feel at home — but it's certainly not fancy. What makes it homey is the hospitality of the youth and adults who work and volunteer there.

Classy digs, fancy fund-raising functions or glossy marketing materials for a non-profit make me nervous. I want my money to go into people and programs — outcomes. For example, I'm no longer contributing to one international relief organization until I have a chance to assess whether its new headquarters are warranted.

As an aside, that's also why I was so pleased with The Salvation Army's Kroc Community Center in North Salem. It's well-designed, pleasant and functional but certainly not ostentatious.

### **Passion**

We all need a personal passion. Mine is Hogar Infantil, a children's home in poverty-stricken Chiapas, Mexico.

Anyone who visits Hogar leaves forever changed. By U.S. standards, the facilities are poor. But what the 80-some children at Hogar have is love — love from a caring staff that emphasizes education and responsibility; love from fellow children who have learned to share and help one another; and love from people in the U.S. who provide almost all the operating funds for Hogar.

Speaking of low overhead, volunteers in the Salem area coordinate the fund-raising. But why support an orphanage in Southern Mexico when there are so many needs in the Mid-Valley? That's a question I asked my family until I joined them as volunteers at Hogar.

The answer is that each of the nonprofits I've mentioned — Salem Leadership Foundation, Isaac's Room/Ike Box and Hogar Infantil — transforms lives.

Without Hogar, most of those children would have little chance to grow up in a safe place, to attend school and to become nurses, teachers, business people, doctors, architects and other professionals in Mexican society.

Hogar is a reminder of what's important in life. It's certainly not about collecting the most possessions or money for oneself.

Dick Hughes, who feels out of sync because he hasn't visited Hogar Infantil since last year, is the editorial page editor of the Statesman Journal. His column appears on Thursdays. Contact him at [dhughes@StatesmanJournal.com](mailto:dhughes@StatesmanJournal.com); P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309; or (503) 399-6727. Read his blog at [StatesmanJournal.com/DickHughes](http://StatesmanJournal.com/DickHughes).