The Sand Hill Foundation, founded by Tom Ford and his wife Susan Ford Dorsey, has been a significant contributor to local nonprofits and programs. The foundation has provided more than $88 million in grants to support health, environment, and economic security initiatives. Since its inception in 1995, the foundation has demonstrated a commitment to nimbleness, responsiveness, and awareness of community needs.

InnVision Shelter Network, The Peninsula Open Space Trust, and Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula are among the beneficiaries of the Sand Hill Foundation’s support. For example, Bruce Ives, CEO of InnVision Shelter Network, notes that the foundation has provided support since 1992, before the foundation was even established. The foundation has helped Haven Family House in Menlo Park, which provides interim shelter and services for 23 homeless families with a success rate of more than 90 percent in helping families find stable, permanent housing.

The environment is another cause long supported by the Sand Hill Foundation. When the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) was founded in 1977, it was Mr. Ford who provided the trust its first office on Sand Hill Road. POST has helped save more than 75,000 acres of open space and parkland in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz counties.

The foundation’s responsive support has also been critical to organizations like Haven Family House, which has seen fluctuations in homelessness. "Homelessness has never gone away," Mr. Ives says. "It’s gone up and down."

The Sand Hill Foundation’s approach to giving has been instrumental in supporting organizations like Haven Family House and the Peninsula Open Space Trust. As the foundation celebrates its 20th anniversary, it continues to demonstrate its commitment to nimbleness, responsiveness, and awareness of changing community needs.

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Hill Foundation, who see the environment and sustainability through the same lens that we do," she said.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula has also had a longstanding partnership with the Sand Hill Foundation, says executive director, Peter Fortenbaugh. In 1993, Susan Ford Dorsey co-founded the center for a New Generation, an after-school academic enrichment program, with Condoleeezza Rice. Since 1996, it has been operated by the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula.

"Sand Hill (Foundation) has been an incredible partner for BGCP," Mr. Fortenbaugh said. "Their long term and generous financial support has helped us expand our school based programs and deepen our partnerships with schools."

Giving Back

In addition to its impact on empowering local nonprofits, the Sand Hill Foundation has had an impact on the philanthropy workforce. In 2001, the foundation established the Tom Ford Fellowship in Philanthropy, which provides three Stanford graduates with a salary, health insurance, and mentorship to pursue work at any U.S. foundation.

In 2006, Dana Schmidt was selected for the fellowship and went to work at another Menlo Park-based philanthropy: the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. There, she spent a year with the foundation's president, Paul Brest, working on philanthropy in international education and supporting Mr. Brest's research for a book on strategic giving.

"It was very much a launching pad for me," Ms. Schmidt says of her Tom Ford Fellowship experience. "As I think about myself vis-a-vis other colleagues at the foundation and program officers, I am very thankful." She also says that the Hewlett Foundation has since launched its own three-year fellowship program in response to the Tom Ford Fellowship program's demonstration of how valuable it could be to give people early in their careers the opportunity to work in philanthropy.

Susan Ford Dorsey

Co-founder and president of the foundation, Ms. Ford Dorsey, 61, has spent the last two decades working in philanthropy full-time, and nearly a lifetime in community service. Her eyes light up when she recalls a formative experience with giving when she was 10 years old.

In Santa Cruz, where she grew up, she was out with her parents helping deliver toys at Christmas to children of low-income families. What struck her, she says, was the look of excitement on the faces of the parents.

"Their Christmas was just like our Christmas," she says, and by that she means that the parents of her less-affluent peers had the same aspirations for their children — health, happiness and security — as her parents had for her.

But the experience came with a dose of wisdom, too: Those parents were going to have a much harder time giving their kids the same kind of opportunities she had as the daughter of a local doctor.

A commitment to philanthropy and community service stayed with her, she says, as she grew up and went to college. She attended the University of California at San Diego, majoring in cellular biology, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she attained a master's degree in public health.

Even while serving as president of Health Innovations, a healthcare consulting firm she founded, she volunteered with nonprofits and was a court-appointed child advocate.

Even after 20 years of fulltime philanthropy, Ms. Ford Dorsey shows no signs of slowing down. Twenty years from now, she says, the foundation will still be around. In the last five years, she says, preserving open space in the Peninsula has become more challenging, and she expects the challenge to escalate in the future. She has also seen an uptick in the need for increased educational opportunities for "poor immigrant children."

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