

# Visionaries

The health and racial disparities that 2020 has laid bare have only served to reinforce Susan Ford Dorsey's commitment to philanthropy. Dorsey is not new to these causes — she's been working to make this region a better place ever since she was a little girl growing up in Santa Cruz County, where she witnessed the needs of migrant farm workers while doing volunteer work with her parents.

This commitment to helping others is something Dorsey and her late husband, Tom Ford, had in common. Ford was also introduced to the power of giving back as a child growing up in Youngstown, Ohio. He watched as his parents established scholarships at Youngstown State University, volunteered with an organization for the blind and participated heavily in their church community.

When the two married in 1991, Ford had a long history with the Peninsula Community Foundation (PCF), one of two foundations that merged to form SVCF. The relationship deepened as the couple considered new ways to help the community foundation increase its impact — and they decided to give a gift that would keep giving for years to come.

## The Gift

In 1996, Ford was the well-known real estate developer responsible for creating the environmentally friendly properties along Sand Hill



It was important to Susan Ford Dorsey and her late husband, Tom Ford, that their gift go to their local community foundation.

SHEETA MAHANT

# A Legacy OF Giving

A gift that Susan Ford Dorsey and her late husband, Tom Ford, made to the SVCF endowment in the mid-90s continues to change lives today

By Colleen Ringer

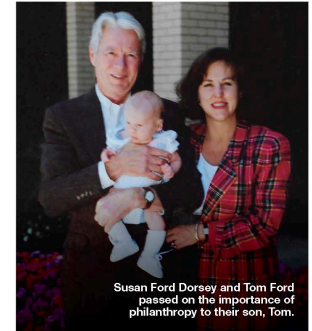
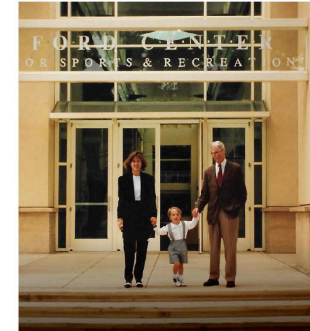
Road in Menlo Park, California, and making them home to the renowned venture capital firms that fuel Silicon Valley's innovation economy. "He gave a portion of his own investment in those properties to the Peninsula Community Foundation endowment," Dorsey says. "He said, 'This real estate interest will generate income on an annual basis, and it will increase in value within your endowment over the years.' And that's exactly what happened. He took delight in telling his tenants that a portion of their rent each month went to helping the community."

Ford and Dorsey could have given this tremendously generous gift to any number of organizations, but it was important to them that it go to their local community foundation and be named the Sand Hill Endowment Fund.

"During our walks around the neighborhood, we would often talk about our philanthropy and how important a partnership with the Peninsula Community Foundation was," Dorsey recalls. "Because of their in-depth knowledge of the community, their staff and expertise, they knew where the greatest needs were — something that we as individual philanthropists would find impossible. Knowing that we would be helping many more people over time by supporting the community foundation in this way gave us great satisfaction."

Fast-forward to early 2020 when the famed Sand Hill Road properties were sold to another developer and SVCF's share of the proceeds in the Sand Hill Endowment Fund increased significantly. This fund now constitutes 56% of the entire SVCF endowment — a remarkable legacy to the community that demonstrates the power of thinking long-term. "We never could have guessed that this endowment gift would fully mature during a pandemic when local community needs are so acute," Dorsey says.

The funds allow SVCF staff to pursue flexible grantmaking that is responsive to community needs — this year and for years to come — including numerous causes that Dorsey herself champions. Those issues include education, bolstering



Susan Ford Dorsey and Tom Ford passed on the importance of philanthropy to their son, Tom.

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financial stability for low-income households and affordable housing.

"We had such respect for the work of PCF and their ability to understand the needs of the various parts of our community," Dorsey says. "We looked at the community foundation as our partner in helping people in ways we couldn't. We wanted to support that in a lasting way."

## It All Comes Back to Community

The thread running through the couple's legacy of giving is community. Ford's strong commitment to helping the communities where he and Dorsey lived and worked was evident in everything he did — it's something he even built into his commercial buildings. "He was known for being a community builder," Dorsey says. "He and I shared a recognition that we all benefit from a strong community. If we help each other and support the fabric of the community, we're all going to be better off."

Community was the driving force behind not only their gift to SVCF, but also the couple's

## START YOUR OWN LEGACY

When you give to SVCF's endowment fund, you're helping to meet the needs of our community today and for years to come. Learn more at [siliconvalleycf.org/community-endowment](http://siliconvalleycf.org/community-endowment).

creation in 1995 of the Sand Hill Foundation, where Dorsey serves as president. The private foundation's focus areas underscore Ford and Dorsey's commitment to health, economic and educational opportunity, the environment and sustainability.

One issue that Dorsey finds particularly troubling is education or, rather, who has access to it. "It's heartbreaking to me when we lose an opportunity to lift up children," she says. "There are always inequities when it comes to money, but it seems we should be in a much better place in terms of removing barriers to a quality education and tools for lifelong well-being. We should be able to do that."

These are causes the Sand Hill Endowment Fund and SVCF champion through initiatives ranging from early childhood education programs to scholarships. And they are crucial to effectively building stronger, healthier local communities, Dorsey says.

"It makes me happy to know that a piece of Tom will live on in all corners of our community through this gift to the endowment," she says. "He will continue to make lives better, just as he did every day that he was alive."