

# 'Tis far better to give

The death of Kerry Packer, one of Australia's greatest philanthropists, has turned the spotlight on the act of giving to charity. Is it in or out of fashion? Amy Fallon of AAP reports

If charity has become sexy, then should more of Australia's richest people open up their wallets?

Some of the country's wealthiest people have proven to be big givers in the past.

Media giant Kerry Packer, the country's richest man before his passing on December 26 last year, donated millions to a long list of deserving charities, including the Children's Hospital at Westmead and the NSW Ambulance Service.

Other notable Australian philanthropists include Richard Pratt, Dick Smith, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and Lady Mary Fairfax.

Their donations, while generous, are small compared to some of the contributions to charity made by some of America's richest of the rich.

US businessman Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, now gives as much as \$A350 million at the one time for causes such as malaria in Africa.

He does this through The Gates Foundation, set up in 1995.

For his efforts, Gates, his wife Melinda and U2 lead singer Bono - described as the 'rocker who has made debt reduction sexy' - were named *Time* magazine's 2005 Persons of the Year.

Little-known Sydney millionaire and investor Greg Poche, 63, is definitely leading the charge when it comes to 'digging deep' for charity.

Poche has sailed the equivalent of five around-the-world trips and could be spending all his money on a nice retirement at sea.

Instead he's just opened his wallet - to the tune of \$30 million - in the hope of finding a cure for melanoma.

Mr Poche, who built the transport company Star Track Express and is among Australia's 20 richest people, made the donation for a new Sydney Melanoma Unit at North Sydney's Mater Hospital.

It's thought to be the largest single public charitable donation by an individual in Australia.

The funding will allow the development of an anti-cancer vaccine and other projects to be developed.

Mr Poche also will fund the centre once it's established.

He said ordinary Australians had got their act together, pointing out they gave more per capita than anywhere else in the world for tsunami relief efforts and did millions of hours of volunteer work.

But it was the truly well-to-do Australians who had to come to the party.

"I think what Australia lacks is a culture of very well-off financially people making big endowments," said Mr Poche.

"I think America's got that in very large order."

Despite not enjoying publicity, he said he wanted to 'stand up and speak' as it might encourage others to be generous.

"Big-picture projects, like I'm fortunate to be involved in, need patrons."

"The drip principle doesn't work. They need someone who will take an entrepreneurial approach to financial support."

Business people themselves had a lot to gain from giving, he believed.

"Entrepreneurs get a lot out of that because they thrive on success and being able to pick winners."

"Well there's plenty of winners to pick..."

The Sydney Community Foun-

## Australia's biggest donors

Some Australian philanthropists and what they've given:

**Greg Poche (pictured below, centre):**  
The investor has donated \$30 million for a new Sydney Melanoma Unit at North Sydney's Mater Hospital

**Kerry Packer (pictured right):**  
The late media mogul gave \$2.5 million to the NSW Ambulance Service and many millions more to other charities, including the Children's Hospital at Westmead and Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital

**Dick Smith (pictured below, right):**  
The adventurer forked out \$1 million to charities and other organisations, such as the Fred Hollows Foundation and Sydney's Powerhouse Museum,

to mark Australia's Centenary of Federation

**Dame Elisabeth Murdoch:**  
The 96-year-old mother of Rupert Murdoch has given to multiple charitable organisations, including art and medical research

**Dick Pratt (pictured below, left):**  
The businessman chipped in \$1 million from the family foundation for last year's tsunami relief efforts

**John Forsyth:**  
The Dymocks Booksellers chairman donated \$500,000 to the children's charity Plan Australia

**Rupert Myer:**  
The grandson of retail giant Sidney Myer has given to multiple organisations



...ation is aiming to do just that. The SCF is based on overseas foundations, most notably the New York Community Trust, which was founded nearly 80 years ago and gives to community projects through donations and endowed funds from individuals, families, companies and charities.

Philanthropist Heather Kent, who established the SCF, said the organisation now had just under \$500,000 in funds and had already given more than \$100,000 to projects such as Midnight Basketball, which allows Sydney children to play basketball late at night in a bid to prevent crime.

She was hoping the organisation would reach the same level as the Melbourne Community Foun-

...ation, which was formed in 1997. It now has more than \$18 million in funds and has distributed more than \$4 million.

Ms Kent said when it came to comparisons with the US, it must be remembered Australia was a smaller country and the US had different tax laws, mainly death tax duties, which affect giving.

"Obviously, you need to have that charitable, giving mindset, but there's also the fact that people have an incentive (in the US) to give for tax reasons."

Perhaps, though, we are giving just as much as America - but not big-noting ourselves.

Bill Downing is chief officer of United Way Community Funds of Australia, which works to

support the local community by developing corporate involvement programs. Companies which have supported United Way include Fuji Xerox, Zurich, QBE, Wesfarmers, Shell and Mobil.

Mr Downing said there were broad cultural differences between Australia and the US.

"I think that's just a part of the Australian way of life if you like, to sometimes do it subtly without wanting the recognition," he said.

Many companies had found advantages to their philanthropic ways, including better staff morale, he said.

"I think companies are now realising that they do operate in broader communities, they have stakeholders and not shareholders

and those stakeholders do include their local community," said Mr Downing.

But he said there needed to be easier ways for them to give.

"I think people really need to have the confidence about where their donation is going."

Gina Anderson, chief executive of Philanthropy Australia said Australians, unlike Americans, 'celebrated teams' and chose to give in this way. She pointed to the Smith Family, formed in 1922 when four businessmen wanted to give some toys to an orphanage.

"The matron at the orphanage said, 'where can the children send the thankyou letters?'," said Ms Anderson. "And they said, 'we're all Smith'."

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