

## Keeper of a family's generous flame

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On a crisp August morning, philanthropist David Rockefeller Jr stood outside his home on Mount Desert Island, just off the coast of Maine, and scanned the nearby trees for signs of a breeze. An avid yachtsman, he hoped the winds would pick up in time for an afternoon sail.

The cliff-top eyrie, The Ways, in tiny Seal Harbor, is so named because it stands at the convergence of eastern and western routes to the island. The only impediment to unobstructed views of the Atlantic are rows of evergreen trees cascading down a precipice that he has chosen to nurture, even if it means descending a steep flight of granite steps to catch sight of his prized sailing vessels moored below.

Mr Rockefeller - a rising leader of the Rockefeller dynasty and a renowned advocate for education and the environment - first visited the island at age five and has not missed a summer since. But his family's history here goes back a century. His late grandfather, John D. Rockefeller Jr, bought large tracts of surrounding land and eventually donated 51 miles of carriage roads and 11,000 acres to help create Acadia National Park.

In 1991 Mr Rockefeller organised a 10-week, 3,000-mile sailing expedition to introduce some 200 friends to the vulnerabilities of Alaska and its native cultures. It was a seminal trip.

"I was already a lover of the environment through my passions for mountain hiking and sailing, but this was really life-transformative," he says, describing his first foray into what has become nearly two decades of environmental work.

Mr Rockefeller, now 67, was the first non-Alaskan to join the board of the Alaska Conservation Foundation, founded the Alaska Fund for the Future, and later led the National Park Foundation. He also joined the Pew Oceans Commission and helped write its 2003 report on the health of American waters.

Sailors for the Sea, a non-profit whose motto is "a new voice for ocean conservation", was born from his alarm over the commission's findings. Its mission is to educate sailors about environmental issues, to motivate them to protect marine habitats and to remain informed about relevant legislation. Mr Rockefeller has been the group's principal financial supporter and chairs its board.

His dedication to the non-profit sector extends back to the mid-1960s and provides a window into his personal pursuits. After graduating from Harvard Law School he worked for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, where he developed a series of concerts for the city's children. "I've been a performer for more than 50 years, so music was always in my life. I wanted to make sure income was not the barrier to people having the same experience," he says.

This job inspired almost 20 years of advocacy for arts education and K-12 public school reform. Yet whatever his focus, his endeavours are defined by fervour and a hands-on approach.

"Very little of all this is just cheque writing. Although I have certainly contributed dollars, what I've really been giving is my time, effort and training as a manager. My philanthropic energy goes into building institutions, figuring out strategy, hiring good people, developing good boards, often leading them and then giving money to support them," he says. "I believe that philanthropy is not just about wealthy people. It's about a spirit of thoughtful giving that can be applied no matter what your situation."

While Mr Rockefeller has committed to his causes for the long-term, he also stresses the strategic use of one's skills and resources and the importance of knowing when to move on. He constantly evaluates his

impact and assesses whether his time is well spent. "I've found I often have to stop doing some things to start doing others," he says.

He has been trained to think of giving in concentric circles, or levels of accountability to one's community, nation and world. "Certainly there is a responsibility to help make the local schools, medical and cultural institutions the best, and to support the infrastructure of the community. That's enlightened self-interest."

To give wisely on a national level requires more research and experience; this is generally where areas of expertise such as sailing come into play. He gives internationally almost exclusively through family institutions such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation, because he trusts their staff to make informed, intelligent decisions.

He acknowledges that charting his own course in his family's 100 years of philanthropy has been "daunting". Having served on the boards of - among others - the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation, and as a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, he has hardly eschewed his ancestors' priorities.

But he has also delighted in updating these organisations to make them more relevant to the needs of modern constituents. "I'm very happy to be a part of that kind of renewal. I've been doing new things in old institutions, plus I've always liked to have a smaller non-profit vehicle that did not come out of family history."

Mr Rockefeller has found his niche as a "contrarian" giver, where he ferrets out a person or cause that might otherwise go undiscovered. "This is the entrepreneurial side of philanthropy. I'm willing to spend a lot of my life thinking about building the non-profit sector, and there are people with good ideas that don't necessarily come out of the big institutions," he says.

The Rockefeller clan, now 200 strong including spouses, has done a good job combating the "shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves" phenomenon - younger generations squandering inheritances - that plague some wealthy families. "I am proud of how well our family has done in retaining core values and educating oncoming generations," Mr Rockefeller says.

He speaks of the collaboration that occurs between and among generations. "We go to aunts and uncles, we consult older cousins on issues of this kind: how do you help a child who's floundering? How much money is too much to give them when they turn 21?"

He also credits his family's institutions with keeping disparate branches of kin together. "The flame of family traditions is maintained in the institutions and the institutional traditions inform the family. We are all very much individuals, but we're all aware that we're carrying the family flag."

Mr Rockefeller has often mentioned the importance of donating his time, particularly as his individual capacity to give is markedly less than previous generations of Rockefellers; his own annual giving is in the six figures.

However, some of the original trusts his grandfather established in 1934 to protect substantial principal wealth are scheduled to dissolve with or possibly before the death of David Rockefeller Jr's generation, meaning his daughters, now in their mid-20s, may soon be the recipients of vast fortunes.

He has instructed them to "work toward self-sufficiency" as if they will inherit no additional money. "If you have a windfall, fantastic. But then you might discover you have friends you didn't know you had who are happy to help you spend it on their projects. There is a certain amount of ease and simplicity in having fewer funds," he advised.

Having chaired or participated in nearly every family enterprise, Mr Rockefeller is widely regarded as the group's rising leader. Yet he demurs, calling his father the "undisputed family patriarch" and praising several cousins for their labours in various family entities.

"I'm a team player, not a loner. I can sail alone, but mostly sailing and boat racing and cruising are very collaborative ventures," he says as he remembers his afternoon plans: racing his International One Design sailboat with five friends.

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