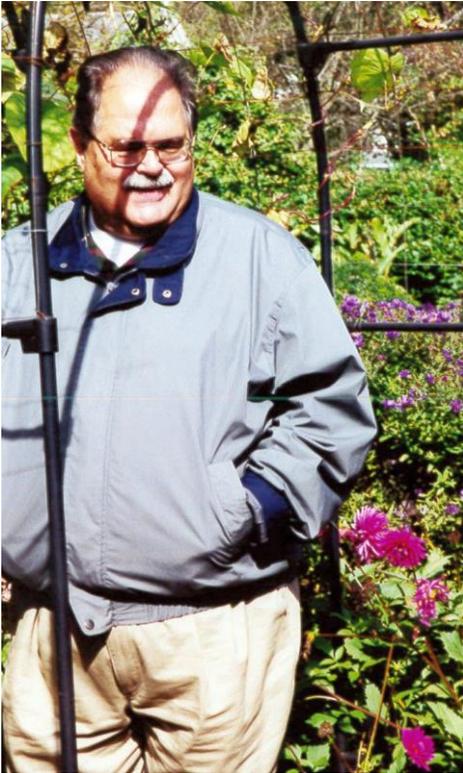


Fundholder Spotlight - Dave Rabaut



Dave Rabaut in his garden.

When David Rabaut was a youngster growing up on the shores of a lake in Michigan, he saw, first hand, what a community of people could accomplish when working together for a common good, for a common goal. “I have always been sympathetic,” Dave says, “to grass roots programs, neighborhood centers, local groups, and strong volunteer groups. I like philanthropy that engages people and empowers them.”

As a long-time staff member with the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, a former Governor of the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation, and a planned giving donor to the Foundation, Dave has had the opportunity to see community needs, community betterment, and the effects of philanthropy over a decades-long career in community service, specifically in human services.

“Philanthropy comes out of a traditional view that it is transformative for the giver as well as the recipient. This is very different from investing, even investing in worthy community causes. Philanthropy is an act of love,” he states.

In addition to providing annual support to the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation, Dave has established his estate planning in such a way that his bequest to the Foundation will provide for the creation of a permanent philanthropic fund, in his name, from which grants will be made in perpetuity to charitable causes and organizations of his choice. He has taken a thought from Benjamin Franklin and stipulated that a percentage of the income from the fund be reinvested in the principle. In that way, the size of the fund and the grants made from the fund, will continually grow.

When Dave retired as Senior Vice President of the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, a fund was created in his name that provides support for the neighborhood initiatives that have been so important to him. The Dave Rabaut Fund for Neighborhood Initiatives is part of the family of United Way funds at by the Community Foundation. “It is gratifying to me,” Dave says, “to know that my support of causes that matter to me will go on long after I’m gone. It will go on forever, thanks to the Community Foundation.”

A teacher and historian by inclination and training, Dave taught history at the college level, in Maryland and Pennsylvania, before changing gears and beginning a 30-year career at the United
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Way. As an undergraduate, Dave learned to frame situations and options in a way that made them instructive for students. His teaching experience fine-tuned his natural ability to articulate facts and interpretations, and the yin-yang of teaching-learning honed his ability to adjust, recalibrate, and communicate; skills that proved to be important in his work with non-profits and community groups.

“I was always interested in organizational dynamics,” he says, “as a scholar and as a practicing teacher. History teaches you respect for the varieties of human experience. It also gives you perspective and tolerance.” Those qualities came to the fore when Dave began his work in community service and they continue with his service on a variety of community boards. “How do you honor people’s passions and mobilize them?” he asks. “How do you move them toward consensus, move from defining needs and problems to mobilizing assets to address and solve them?”

Dave’s paternal great-grandparents came to America from Brussels, Belgium, in the mid-1800s. “At that time Detroit was still frontier territory,” he says. “My great-grandmother began a Belgian lace business - Madame Rabaut’s Laces. Her husband owned a lumber yard and their sons made and sold fireworks.” The family was very involved politically and in their church. In the next generation, several Rabauts became attorneys and diversified even more as business people. One of Dave’s uncles was elected to Congress and is best known for having inserted the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance.

“My mother’s ancestors were German,” he recalls. “Her grandfather was a boiler-maker and her father had a shoe store.” Dave’s mother was one of nine children and Dave has seven brothers and sisters. “My mother had natural organizational skills and kept order in the house.” One of Dave’s favorite recollections is of the children, all very young, standing at the back door demanding to come into the house. “We lived on a lake,” he recalls, “and my mother felt that kids belonged outside. So the door was locked and my mother kept her peace and went about her work.”

What does Dave see when he looks around the greater Lehigh Valley, a broad community that he has worked in and served for the better part of his life? “A tremendous amount of good will,” he says. “People of good will, willing and able to help. I’m always an optimist,” he muses, “and I believe you can get people together. Some of the issues are larger than any small portion of the community and the solutions will have to be larger than any small or single group. There are serious social issues - urban education, urban poverty, land use, environmental issues. It doesn’t help that there are no editorial pages that can guide and inform us as they once did, and we don’t have a true community television station.

“Capitalism generates problems as well as benefits,” Dave observes, “and philanthropy and human services have been designed to address these problems. Capitalism creates winners and losers,

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and we need to have a social contract that provides opportunity and a safety net. But for years we have focused on needs and the capacity to meet them through programs. Perhaps it is time to begin thinking of assets that we all, as individuals and volunteer organizations, have, and how we can bring these to bear on the issues we face.

Where are the current and emerging needs in the community? Dave believes that, “we need stronger volunteer centers and groups, more from churches, more grass roots efforts and self-help organizations. We need to go back to the concept of neighborhood centers, to volunteer action and a focus on building self-sufficiency. We need to strengthen Y’s and Boys & Girls Clubs,” he continues, “and we need to stop thinking in terms of needs and start thinking in terms of assets.”

References to philanthropy almost always generate thoughts of legacy. How does Dave see his legacy, as a teacher, an historian, community service professional, and philanthropist? “Everyone leaves a legacy,” he says. “It is what we leave behind - children, money, institutions. While we often think of philanthropy as gifts of money, we should also think of philanthropy as gifts of time that create the institutions of the community or that help a young person to read or that mentor a person at the start of his or her work life.”

Dave Rabaut’s legacy certainly touches on his work as a teacher, as a community service professional, and as a supporter of the Community Foundation. “What I have enjoyed most,” he says, “are the relationships. The intellectual challenge of creating a course of study was satisfying, and watching students learn and grow is gratifying. In human services, it comes down to ‘how can we improve human life? How do we go from point A to point B?’ It is an intellectual challenge to build a lasting base, to measure outcomes and results.” Does Dave have any regrets regarding his work? “Only that I didn’t have the time or opportunity to work on community development, not just health and human services, but the broader, larger process of community betterment.”

Dave’s lifelong passion for gardening makes it too easy to say that he enjoys seeing work come to fruition. “A lot of the pleasure in gardening is the aesthetic sense. My grandfather raised dahlias and roses, and gardening was simply one of those crafts - like sewing, working on cars or boats - that added to domestic tranquility.”

When he looks to the Foundation’s future, Dave sees challenges and opportunity in equal measure. “We need to create a more active grants process, have a more adventuresome approach to grantmaking, not in terms of size but of strategy. It’s not just what you give but the relationships you build and the constituencies you work with. We should talk about building assets in the community, and less about meeting need. LVCF has been successful in development, but development requires endless cultivation and is likely to become harder. But the Foundation has a compelling message, and our assets will continue to grow - more charitable funds, diverse funds, donor-designated funds, more of that essential heart and satisfaction of philanthropy.



“Lastly, I would say ‘leave a legacy,’ through your gift of time or your bequest to the Foundation and the community.”