

FT WEALTH

## Joy of giving

By Sarah Murray

Since Rand Skolnick died from cancer in 2008, Terrence Meck has been using the funds his partner left to give away \$1m a year, with half going to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth programmes and the rest to health initiatives.

For Meck, this honours the man he loved. However, his strategy also reflects a broader trend among gay philanthropists – their giving increasingly extends beyond LGBT causes.

For Meck, who makes grants through the Palette Fund, the funding allocation reflects his relationship with Skolnick. “We didn’t live an exclusively gay life. We were out and proud, but it didn’t define us,” he says. “And Rand’s family business was in vitamins and health, so the nutrition side was a big part of his life.”

Of course, philanthropists in the gay community make plenty of gifts to support their peers. “I keep giving because all LGBT people have to be on the front lines in winning their own equality,” says

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— Jason Franklin  
Executive Director,  
Bolder Giving



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Tim Gill, the entrepreneur and philanthropist who founded Quark, the developer of page-layout software, and created the Gill Foundation in 1994.

As well as equality initiatives, programmes providing easier access to services such as health and education are also well funded. "LGBT people have always built their own institutions and communities of concern," says Matthew Hart, founder of the Paris-based Lafayette Practice, whose clients include LGBT donors.

While in the US this reflects a relative absence of government support, Hart says that in Europe, "more public resources are set up for communities of concern".

However, in both Europe and the US, the nature of gay philanthropy is changing. In the early 1990s, publicly gay donors such as Gill were few and far between. Most tended to give anonymously or without identifying themselves as gay.

"As more people are comfortable about being out in their entire lives, major gay donors are becoming more public in that part of their identity," says Jason Franklin, executive director of Bolder Giving, a US non-profit that works to inspire individuals to give more of their wealth away.

Other factors are prompting a rise in giving to gay causes. First, more is known about the problems



Honour: Terrence Meck developed the Palette Fund after his partner's death

gay communities face, from the outlawing of homosexuality in some African countries to the homeless youth in America, 40 per cent of whom are gay young people.

"And as gay people are more visible and our issues are understood, not only has it made gay and lesbian people understand where to give their own money, it's also increased giving from non-gay people," says Tim Sweeney, president of the Gill Foundation.

Meanwhile gay donors are expanding their giving to more general causes. Laurie Emrich, who inherited money in her twenties, supports organisations ranging from Urgent Action Fund-Africa, which promotes women's human rights, to a campaign to create the National Progressive Leadership Campus in Washington DC, an

initiative aiming to promote social justice by bringing together non-profits and providing leadership development to young people from diverse backgrounds.

Emrich, who also supports LGBT causes, argues that all types of philanthropists must work together. "It's time to move beyond silos and link organisations and campaigns across issues," she says.

From their home in Minnesota, Charlie Rounds and his husband Mark Hiemenz also support non-gay causes such as women's health and global human rights.

Rounds advocates fiercely for gays and lesbians to become more prominent philanthropists. For example, he and Hiemenz made it explicit that a male gay couple was behind their fund by naming it Mark and Charlie's Gay & Lesbian Fund for Moral Values.

"We use openly gay money to give to non-gay causes so people looking at annual reports can see that gay people are giving to cancer research, the Humane Society or clean water," says Rounds.

Even today, however, being publicly gay – let alone as a prominent philanthropist – is not always easy. For example, in Russia, a new law has banned promotion of homosexuality to children and in many US states, it is still legal to fire an employee for being gay.

Some people may have been

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rejected by their families – or even disinherited – which means family traditions of philanthropy are not passed on.

“And many of us learn our giving through our communities of faith,” says Rounds. “So if we’ve been rejected by that community, we’ve lost that mentorship.”

Given these barriers, Franklin believes it is important to identify individuals who can serve as role models. To do so, Bolder Giving uses its website to highlight stories that might inspire other gay philanthropists to become more visible.

Emrich, who is among those featured, believes this kind of mentorship is critical. “We all know the importance of seeing people who are ‘out’ in public in a broad sense, or supporting a particular position that gay people haven’t participated in before,” she says.

And as gay baby-boomers retire, there is a good reason for encouraging more of them to think about giving. Since many have done well financially but few have children to whom to pass on their money, philanthropy offers a means of creating a legacy. “The possible future contribution is huge,” says Rounds.

Meanwhile, the other legacy Rounds hopes his generation will leave is a more prominent cohort of gay donors. “At this point we’re not always seen as that visible in

giving back to the community,” he says. “And I believe we have to be.” ■