

Philadelphia philanthropist makes difference in Baltimore

What do The Walters Art Museum, the Baltimore Basilica, and Our Daily Bread in Baltimore have in common? Each played a role in what started one man's giving to the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"Every time I went to the Walters and the basilica, I was always walking past Our Daily Bread," said Frank Rasmus, a Philadelphia retiree who has created several endowments for the archdiocese.

Rebecca Rothery, director of Planned and Principal Gifts for Catholic Charities, explained that Rasmus, upon each visit to the museum, "would see the line of people outside Our Daily Bread. That's where he became aware of the need for endowments.

Rasmus found further encouragement when he visited the archdiocesan Web site and found an article about Dr. Henry Sanborn, a retired Towson University economics professor.

"Dr. Sanborn ... donated time to help kids [at the Immaculate Conception School] with math problems," Rasmus explained. "He set up an endowment for the school with a charitable gift annuity - the Immaculate Conception Elementary School Endowment Fund."

Rasmus figured, "If he can do it, I can do it, too."

The Philadelphia resident said of his own philanthropic interests, he has the luxury of being able to "pick and choose things all over the archdiocese that are of interest to me, since I'm not attached to a parish."

Among the endowments Rasmus has begun are the Mary T. Plunkett Endowment Fund benefitting Our Daily Bread and named for Rasmus' grandmother; the Cultural Endowment Fund for Seniors; and the Ethan C. Flint Endowment Fund for Children and Family Services, named for the child of a friend of Rasmus.

"All are managed by the Catholic Family Foundation," said Rothey.

Rasmus said very few of the endowments he has created use his name. "That's just because it isn't about me," he explained.

In fact, one of Rasmus's most recent endeavors is having a far more immediate impact on seniors in the area at his own expense.

"Rather than just creating endowments, he got the idea to help seniors and Catholic Charities programs directly," said Rothey, who put the retiree in contact with the person in charge of entertainment at Catholic Charities senior centers.

"When the Cultural Endowment Fund for Seniors was set up in spring 2008, I found they have DVD players in all the [senior housing] buildings," Rasmus explained. "For next week, I have almost 800 TV episodes in my basement for [Catholic Charities] to distribute between buildings."

Rasmus said he went to Target four times the previous week, picking up DVDs each day of television series such as "Get Smart" and "Everybody Loves Raymond" — "stuff that they watch," he said, "and all stuff appropriate for Catholic senior housing."

He said, "The two main problems seniors have are loneliness and boredom."

He seeks to improve their quality of life "in their tender years."

As though all of this were not enough, "somewhere along the way, he got the idea that seniors could benefit from having CFL light bulbs," Rothey said.

Rasmus has purchased 4,000 of these light bulbs since July for distribution around Catholic Charities senior housing. As a result, he has helped seniors save \$471,000 in electric bills. "That's more money for their medications, to eat, to buy Christmas cards for their grandchildren," said the donor. "The Catholic church allows me to [make these donations]. If they didn't, I couldn't do it."

Rasmus emphasized the immediacy of these donations as opposed to that of his endowments. "There are all these needs, and there isn't necessarily enough money,"

he said, explaining that he wants to do “whatever I can do to help and not wait until I’m dead to have it happen.”

The Philadelphia man drives 118 miles to Baltimore to deliver his purchases for the benefit of seniors and Catholic Charities. “I’m just a delivery boy,” Rasmus said. “It’s just a fun thing to do, and I know it makes a difference in their lives.”