

# Opinion

## Our entire community benefits when we give where we live

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“That’s just the way it is” are six words that too often stand between people and the progress they really want.

At the Center for Nonprofit Leadership at California Lutheran University, we decided it’s no longer good enough to accept that response to a troubling trend that diminishes the quality of life in every Ventura County community.

This may surprise local residents who have witnessed the generosity of their neighbors, but for decades our county has fallen way below other California counties in dollars donated to local nonprofits.

Figures compiled for the 2017 State of the Region Report, released last week by the Ventura County Civic Alliance and reported in The Star, show our nonprofits take in 50 percent less than their counterparts in Los Angeles County and more than 60 percent less than those in Santa Barbara County.

In 2016, Ventura County nonprofits raised just below \$3,150 per resident each year to Santa Barbara’s slightly more than \$8,235 and L.A.’s just over \$6,060.

Donations to local nonprofits would need to increase more than 90 percent even to reach the state average of \$6,000 per resident.

Almost every day, your quality of life is improved by a nonprofit. If your children are involved in the YMCA, a nonprofit benefits your family. If your grandchildren experience the magic of a live stage play, chances are a nonprofit provided that. If a family member has special needs and benefits from vocational training or specialized therapy, that may well be provided by a nonprofit. If you adopt a homeless pet, hike a litter-free trail or listen to a Beethoven overture, a nonprofit likely made that possible.

And as much as nonprofits do, almost every resident has a wish list of what more could be done. Perhaps at the top of your list is a new neighborhood park with programs to fight obesity. Or more services to prevent elder abuse. Or training that prepares kids for good jobs in the 21st century economy.

Our local nonprofits have made progress in fundraising. Their revenue almost doubled between 2005 and 2015, from \$1.4 billion to \$2.7 billion, but the gap between Ventura County giving and that of our neighbors to the north and south has remained persistent over the years.

We believe the disparity is a problem that can be solved with sustained focus, energy and resources. There is an intimate relationship between the nonprofit sector’s capacity to address problems

and donors’ trust in the ability to do so. We believe building capacity and building trust go hand in hand.

Here is what we at the Center for Nonprofit Leadership are doing to address the donation shortfall:

» We started the Live Here/Give Here Task Force and will invite the best minds in local philanthropy to focus on tackling this problem. It will take individual philanthropists, nonprofit leaders and representatives from corporations, foundations and government to change the culture of philanthropy in Ventura County.

» We are engaging academic experts at our local colleges and universities to help us find new sources of data to better understand and track trends in local giving. The State of the Region Report does an outstanding job of providing snapshots of how our community is faring. Over the coming year, we will dig deeper into the statistics and use this new understanding to develop long-term strategies.

» Philanthropist Henry Ford believed that for the best long-term results, his foundation should seek to increase the supply of competent leaders. That is exactly what Cal Lutheran has empowered us to do at the Center for Nonprofit Leadership. We are dedicated to improving the effectiveness of local nonprofits by promoting the highest standards of practice so they use donated dollars effec-

tively. In the fall, the center will launch a Board Leadership Institute to ensure nonprofit trustees know their oversight and fundraising responsibilities. That is critical in building the trust it takes to get individuals, major foundations and corporations to invest in local nonprofits.

» We invite input from you to help us understand how we can open the channels of philanthropy in our county. Tell us why you give to local nonprofits and why you don’t. Offer suggestions on how to spread the Live Here/Give Here message. Let us know if you might be willing to take part in a focus group or answer a questionnaire. Send your feedback to [nonprofit@callutheran.edu](mailto:nonprofit@callutheran.edu).

This is a problem for the entire philanthropic sector of Ventura County. We believe that with these steps and by working together to Live Here/Give Here, we will make steady progress in building nonprofits that don’t settle for the status quo but work with the people of Ventura County to create homegrown solutions that will make us the envy of this state.

*Kate McLean, of Westlake Village, is chairwoman of the Center for Nonprofit Leadership Advisory Board. Bryan McQueeney, of Thousand Oaks, is chairman of the center’s Program Design Committee and the Live Here/Give Here Task Force.*