

Family Philanthropy

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The Sean and Kristin Varner Family Donor Advised Fund was begun last year. But in reality, its genesis can be traced back through several generations of philanthropic giving.

In short, to borrow from a country song, "It's a family tradition." Although difficult to pinpoint exactly when the family philosophy of community giving was initiated, this much is known: The Varners descend from those who called the Riverside area home in the 1850s, and it is entirely likely the roots of giving can be traced to that point.

"As young kids, we were always taught that our family legacy is to raise people up," said Sean Varner, managing partner of Varner & Brandt, a legal firm

with roots in Riverside since 1873 itself. "We serve our community because we can and it is rewarding to use our good fortune to provide better lives for others."

The choice of The Community Foundation to administer the fund was made after years of careful observation as to what the Foundation consistently brought to the community.

The fund doesn't pinpoint any specific causes or groups; rather, Sean and Kristin (senior attorney with Varner & Brandt) consider local organizations that assist children, education, or generally those less fortunate than themselves. They also support organizations that enhance the cultural aspects of the community.

Growing up, Sean didn't have to look

far for his inspiration in giving to others.

His father Bruce, senior partner at Varner & Brandt, has practiced law in southern California since 1963. Along the way, he has served the community by providing pro bono legal services and by sharing his expertise and counsel on an array of community boards.

That sense of dedication to his fellow citizens did not go unnoticed by decision-makers in high places. In 2006, he was named to the University of California Board of Regents by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Closer to home, and for many years prior to that appointment, his example was not lost on his son Sean.

"Our parents often included us in the decisions regarding the time and resources we gave to the community," Sean Varner recalled. "Now, Kristin and I do the same with our kids. We discuss with them why we give our time and resources to charity with the hope that they adopt our family philosophy." By word and deed, the example Sean and Kristin Varner have and continue to set for their children is that giving is its own best reward. They're extending a legacy that has existed 150 years. At the same time, they also hope that with each gift, another individual or another family may discover the same sense of satisfaction felt by giving others a helping hand.

"We hope that our philosophy is contagious," Sean said. "Our hope is that others can look beyond their daily routines and comfort to find a purpose in serving others. If we successfully provide an opportunity, perhaps the beneficiary of that opportunity repeats those efforts and the cycle begins anew."

