

# Giving is Central to the American Story



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*The Almanac of American Philanthropy* author Karl Zinsmeister recently regaled an Ocean Reef audience with tales of larger-than-life American characters whose philanthropic passions changed our country and the world for the better.

Take Tabasco heir Ned McIlhenny, for example, who was raised on the bayou before saving hundreds of sailors as an Arctic explorer, and then went on to singlehandedly save both egrets and Negro spirituals (including one later famously quoted by MLK) from extinction. History fails to recognize amateur scientist Alfred Loomis who funded the labs which produced the practical radar sets that turned the tide in of World War II, and whose methods were then emulated by the Manhattan Project which helped end it. And then there's Katherine McCormack, the sole private funder responsible for the birth-control pill. Zinsmeister's book and talk shed light on the stories of many well and less known philanthropists, including the "little guys" who collectively do the majority of giving.

While there's no hope of conveying Karl Zinsmeister's encyclopedic knowledge of American philanthropy or storytelling skills here, I will pass along some of the impressive facts about our philanthropic exceptionalism to speak for themselves:



Karl Zinsmeister



Jeremy Fitzgerald with Karl Zinsmeister.

- The nonprofit sector employs 11 percent of the U.S. workforce and contributes around six percent of GDP.

- That doesn't include the economic impact of nearly 8 billion hours of service by 63 million American volunteers, worth about \$200 billion in labor each year.

- The nonprofit sector passed the national defense sector in size in 1993 and private U.S. donations overseas "substantially exceed" foreign aid by the US government.

- Seven out of 10 Americans donate to at least one charitable cause, at an average rate of \$2,600, each year.

- U.S. donations are two to 20 times higher than "in other countries of comparable wealth and modernity." Americans give

about twice as much as Canadians, Spaniards and the Irish, and about 20 times what Germans and Italians give.

- Americans now give over \$373 billion annually, with the vast majority given by individuals (private foundations account for 14 percent of our giving and corporations just 5 percent).

Simply put, in Zinsmeister's words, "Philanthropy is a huge part of what makes America America." Our gratitude goes to the Farmer Family Foundation, which brought him to our attention and facilitated the visit through the The Philanthropy Roundtable. We are always on the lookout for great speakers on philanthropy-related topics; please share your recommendations at [foundation@oceanreef.com](mailto:foundation@oceanreef.com).