

The \$50 million milestone

By: Katel on October 10, 2013



Lee Kopp

How does it feel to give \$50 million to charity? “Not much different than it felt yesterday,” says Lee Kopp of Kopp Investment Advisors, who reached that milestone earlier this year. “You can’t get carried away with your achievements in life,” says Kopp. “There’s always another hill to climb tomorrow.”

Lee Kopp has been climbing hills and achieving new levels of success all his life. Born and raised in North Minneapolis, Lee graduated from Patrick Henry High School and the University of Minnesota with honors. He met his wife Barbara in Washington DC while in the Navy, and together they settled in the Twin Cities to raise their family. Lee started Kopp Investment Advisors in 1990 and his success has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, and Kiplinger’s Personal Finance Magazine.

Bringing hope and opportunity to Guatemala

Lee and Barbara, who have given more than \$1 million to Common Hope since 1987, learned of our work through mutual friends of the organization. Barbara and daughter Kristin, both of whom serve on the board of directors for the Kopp Family Foundation, visited Guatemala in 2000 and the foundation has been giving generously to our work ever since.

A firm belief in the power of education

Education has been of primary importance to the Kopp Family Foundation since the beginning, and is one of the reasons our goals are so well aligned. The foundation began in 1987 with \$70,000 in stock that Lee managed and made grow. Their first gift was to the Evans Scholarship Fund for caddies at the University of Minnesota, and scholarships now comprise approximately sixty percent of their annual giving.

Lee, whose mother was a high school graduate and father made it through eighth grade, was a first generation college student. He remembers how difficult life was for his father, getting up each day at 4 or 5 a.m. in all kinds of weather to get to his job as a parking lot attendant. Although Lee himself wasn't initially sure about attending college, one of his high school teachers encouraged him to go.



Lee & Barbara Kopp

The Kopp Family Foundation has similarly encouraged students to attend college, giving away nearly \$1 million in scholarships each year to students at the high school and college level. “There are two reasons scholarships are important,” says Lee. “The recognition and the pat on the back are very helpful. And the financial assistance is very helpful too.”

Leading by example

Lee has a modest and quiet presence. Although he is a model of philanthropic giving, he is not inclined to sound the trumpet for this or any of his other life achievements. “You have to lead by example,” says Kopp. “People don't like to be judged, and you can say what you like, but it's how they observe you in action that counts.”

Lee recounts the story of a young woman he knew who felt indebted to his family because of their generosity to her. She believed she owed them five thousand dollars. Lee and Barbara saw things differently, and didn't want to take her money, particularly because she was struggling. They suggested she give the money she believed she owed to help children in need. Recently they learned that this woman had paid it forward more profoundly than they had ever imagined. Over the years she had given more than \$30,000 dollars to children in the form of books, clothing, coats, hats and mittens. She then wrote to say that her debt was paid in full. “It was very touching,” said Lee, in his understated way.

Lee's recounting of his family's \$50 million dollar milestone was understated in much the same way. “It's nice to see,” he says.

Thank you

On behalf of the children and families in Guatemala who have benefitted from the tremendous generosity of the Kopp Family Foundation, as well as the countless others who have received scholarships, emergency services, housing and spiritual growth opportunities through the foundation, thank you for opening your heart to those less fortunate and sharing your resources for the greater good. Your example is inspiring and we are all the better for it.