

Sobrato Foundation recognized by fundraising professionals

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The Sobrato Family Foundation has become the youngest organization to win the outstanding Foundation Award presented by the International Association of Fundraising Professionals.

The honor comes as no surprise to the valley's nonprofits, 355 of which have been the recipients of assistance from the foundation in the form of grants, loans, donations of property and rent-free office space.

"They're so involved in everything," says Kathy Linton, chief development officer for the YWCA of Silicon Valley. YWCA was recently granted rent-free office space in The Sobrato Center for Nonprofits, a Milpitas Business Park that the Sobrato Foundation has converted to be used by 30 nonprofit agencies. That means \$9 million that those organizations would be paying in rent is instead being used to provide services to the community.

One of the things that makes the foundation unique is that it provides money and real estate exclusively for general operating support to nonprofits.

John A. Sobrato attributes that strategy to foundation Executive Director Diane Ford.

"When she first joined us as executive director, she went out and inter-

viewed existing grantees and asked what their needs are," Sobrato says. He says typically only about 10 percent of donated dollars are designated to help keep the doors open, the lights on and the employees paid at nonprofits.

"Everyone wants to give money to a particular program or to a building with their name on it," he says.

Operations is "the most difficult dollar to raise," he says.

The Sobrato Foundation was nominated for the AFP award by the 400 members of the Golden Gate and Silicon Valley chapters of AFP in California. This year AFP had to pick a winner from among 170 nominations.

"Not only have they shown extraordinary commitment to philanthropy through financial support, but each of the foundation's four innovative charitable programs encourage and motivate others to get involved in the charitable sector as well. They truly epitomize the spirit of this award," says Paulette Maehara, president and CEO of AFP in a press release.

The Sobrato Family Foundation was presented with the award at the Mar. 27 AFP Awards for Philanthropy banquet in Dallas, Texas.

In the 10 years since the Sobrato Foundation was founded, it has given 971 grants to 355 organizations totaling \$71 million in cash, \$16 million in loans and in kind office space, and \$218 million in real estate.

John A. Sobrato says the donating spirit was instilled in him by his mother, Ann Sobrato, who, when John was

a boy, volunteered her time even when her family was not very well off. Both she and her husband were Italian im-

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Kathy Linton
YWCA of Silicon Valley

migrants. Ann Sobrato began investing in real estate in 1952, after her husband died, and became successful at that.

In 1996, Ann Sobrato; her son John A. Sobrato; his wife Sue and their children, John Michael, Sheri and Lisa, founded the Sobrato Family Foundation. And they are all active community volunteers.



John M. Sobrato

Barry Del Buono, chief executive officer and president of EHC LifeBuilders, one of the largest providers of shelter for the homeless in Silicon Valley, says the Sobratos definitely do their homework before they invest their money. The foundation has donated \$12.5 million to help EHC build a homeless youth shelter under

construction in downtown San Jose.

Del Buono says that when John Sobrato came to him with the donation, "He knew more about the plans to build the thing than I did." He says the family has applied the business principles that made them wealthy to their philanthropic efforts as well. "It's the incorporation of sound business sense, the entrepreneurial spirit of developers, which is a risk-taking spirit, as well as a belief system of helping your neighbor," he says.

EHC was recently granted space in the Sobrato Center for Nonprofits and will move its corporate headquarters there. Del Buono expects that move alone to save the organization \$100,000 annually that can be put to work helping the homeless.

EHC also operates a 9,000-square-foot organization in that same office park which Del Buono refers to as "the small mall." It's basically a storeroom of items donated from the community that staff from nonprofits can come to for resources for their clients.

"How the Sobrato Foundation approaches philanthropy is through development of partnerships, which is very typical of how they approach business," Del Buono says. "They get the job done in time, on budget and then move on. It's truly a pleasure to work with such a group because they are so involved in the projects they are funding."

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