

**American Red Cross – Mid Florida Region  
Inaugural Clara Barton Society Recognition  
Leu Gardens  
Orlando Florida  
January 21, 2010**

**“Ordinary People Creating an Extraordinary Community:  
Profiles in Caring”**

Good afternoon everyone. I am delighted to be with you for the inaugural Clara Barton Society recognition – named for the foundress of the American Red Cross – acknowledging and honoring individuals and companies, like yourselves, whose leadership and generosity, in service of humanity, carry out the lifesaving mission of the American Red Cross.

Allow me to read the last paragraph of an editorial in today's *Orlando Sentinel* entitled “A Region of Givers.”

“We don't have enough space here to observe all good works on Haiti's behalf. And that's good. It says something **extraordinary** about a community that, caught in a painful vise of unemployment and fiscal uncertainty, rises and proves that it is, indeed, its brother's keeper.”

I could not have written a better editorial.

In the brief time we have together this afternoon I want to share with you my thoughts on ***Ordinary People Creating an Extraordinary Community – Profiles in Caring***.

As much as you might like me to talk about Harry P. Leu, benefactor of these beautiful gardens; or Charles Hosmer Morse, whose fortune as an industrialist created the foremost collection of Tiffany in the entire world located in Winter Park; or the story of Edyth Bush - a woman devoted to goodness and beauty, an artist who influenced the life of thousands, a philanthropist whose generosity lives on -- the story that I am most interested in, is you, the individual donor, the hard working, tax paying, community caring individual donor, who writes a check to the Red Cross and your other favorite charities.

You, the individual donor, can see a compelling need with more clarity and can respond more quickly than any government or foundation can. An individual donor does not need to submit to a Board of Directors or

a Board of Commissioners. It's not necessary for you to review the by-laws or statutes for authority of purpose. You don't need to process a check through a trust company or the bureaucracy of government. You don't need a lawyer to draft up a grant agreement. You are the most powerful collective voice in what Clara Barton called the "Good Samaritan Nation" – the United States of America, the most generous country in the history of mankind, and that makes you, and the collective you, the most powerful force for good in the world. The tragedy in Haiti bears witness to the generosity of the American people, in this room, across the Sunshine State and throughout the United States. It's all about you, and people like you, including Lawrence Ruf and Jack Wilkinson whose stories will conclude my remarks.

In 2008, the latest statistics available, as reported by GIVING USA, the bible of charitable statistics, Americans contributed \$307 billion, yes, billion, to non-profit organizations. Of that \$307 billion, 75 percent was given by individuals, 13 percent by foundations, 7 percent by charitable bequests, and 5 percent by corporations. The collective you, the individual donor provided 82% of all charitable contributions! That's the good news! The reality, however, is that as individuals we all felt it in our pocket book, our wallet and in our 401(k)'s. This in turn decreased America's 2008 total giving by 5.7%, adjusted for inflation - the largest drop in American charity since the year before I was born, 1955. The decrease in charitable giving combined with the increased need for services put a strain on the Red Cross – Mid Florida Region and other nonprofit organizations, but they cut their budgets and focused their programs, and they discovered or rediscovered their "living endowment," you, the collective you, the individual donor.

From the time of Alexis De Tocqueville, the French political thinker and historian who wrote "Democracy in America," the definitive treatise on the American character - Americans have come together to help one another, and the world, collectively! Think of what individual donors have accomplished in our history. In 1938, the March of Dimes, then known as the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, came up with the revolutionary idea of asking people over the radio – the latest technology available - to send in their dimes to the White House to battle the scourge known as polio. Teenagers laid long strips of Scotch tape on the side walk and asked people to stick dimes on it. Small towns across the country would spread canvases on their basketball courts at half time for people to pitch their dimes for a good cause. Walt Disney Studios even made a cartoon with the Disney Characters marching to fight polio and singing the words, "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho,/"

We'll lick ol' polio,/ With dimes and quarters,/ And our doll-aars,/ Heigh-Ho, Heigh-ho." Rotary International would later take on the challenge and successfully rid polio from the face of the earth, one pancake breakfast at a time, one "happy buck" announcement at a time, one nation at a time.

In the 1980's, FarmAid brought attention to the issues faced by rural America. "We are the World" focused financial resources, the media and pop culture on starvation in Africa. In 2005, Lance Armstrong and his yellow "Live Strong" bracelets raised millions for cancer. There are now plastic color bracelets of every cause and every disease one can imagine. Today, the modern day "dime toss" is texting. How would you like to be a part of a 25 million dollar gift?

**Please allow me to text "Haiti" to 90999 for the Red Cross.**

Now that's power! You might not ever be able to make a 25 million dollar gift to the Red Cross but you can be part of one.

My point is that citizen generosity through individual donors like you is a powerful force in our society. Foundations and corporations look to see if nonprofits are being supported by the community. You, the collective you, represent an endorsement, an authentication, an approval of the Red Cross or other charitable causes. If young people, retired people, small business owners and community leaders are contributing to the Red Cross, corporations and foundations see this and say yes! If you, the collective you, don't give, it gives institutional donors every reason not to give.

The power of your contribution to the American Red Cross – Mid Florida Region substantially increases the ability of our Red Cross to care for those in need – those who need a blanket, a sandwich, a place to stay; those who need training, those who need blood, and those who need the enduring impact of human compassion, neighbor loving neighbor! You have the power to quickly respond with an unrestrictive gift, to put the money to the greatest good. Your contribution gives voice to what is inside of your heart!

Through your sustained annual gift, you are the "Living Endowment" for the Red Cross. Assets can be written off the balance sheet, government can try to spend its way out of a recession, but your passion, compassion and heart for this community and the Red Cross can never be downsized.

In an era of failed banks, collapsed automobile companies, credit freezes, worthless insurance companies and Madoff, it is you - the individual donor, the ordinary person - who continues to make our community and America an extraordinary place!

So what about Lawrence Ruf and Jack Wilkinson? Well they are ordinary people creating an extraordinary community through their charity, just like you and me.

**Lawrence E. Ruf**, who died at 95, had a long career with Exxon, starting in the mailroom and working his way up to become a company accountant. He was smart with his money, always skimping and saving. In retirement, he and his wife moved to Manatee County where they continued their frugal ways. Ruf dressed plainly and, according to his nephew, he "drove the cheapest car you could get." Ruf decided he would leave his \$2.2-million estate to 26 different charities — one for each letter in the alphabet, in Manatee County.

The money began arriving in the latter half of 2009 — at a time when it was particularly needed with all the non-profits hurting.

**Jack Wilkinson**, a 96-year-old former math teacher and peanut farmer, announced he would leave \$2.5 million to a Central Florida Community College to build a permanent campus in Levy County. In announcing his gift, he explained that "It was a pleasure to be able to give it for education."

Wilkinson, who earned his teaching certificate from the University of Florida, taught for 45 years in Levy County.

*Florida Trend*, Florida's business magazine, named these gentlemen *Florida Trend* News Maker of the year for Philanthropy. The most notable philanthropists are not always the biggest givers but they are profiles in caring, ordinary people creating an extraordinary community, just like you, just like in today's *Orlando Sentinel* Editorial.

Congratulations to each and every one of you for continuing the legacy of Clara Barton and the Central Florida and American spirit of generosity.