

- DavidsonNews.net - <http://davidsonnews.net> -

Philanthropist Doris Buffett talks about the art of giving

Posted By [David Boraks](#) On January 13, 2010 @ 10:33 am In [Davidson College](#), [Davidson and the World](#), [Nonprofit news](#), [Top stories](#) | [No Comments](#)



Doris Buffett talks to reporters and Davidson College officials Tuesday afternoon. (Bill Giduz photo)

improved the lives of those "who would otherwise be ignored," Ms. Buffett said.

The foundation has a special relationship with Davidson College, as the first recipient of a sunbeam grant was a Davidson graduate. Since then, other Davidson students have also received Sunshine Lady grants. One of the most recent examples is Jared Smith, a senior intern in the college's Community Service Office. He received a \$10,000 grant that helped HealthReach Community Clinic of Mooresville to implement a new electronic medical records software system, according to the college.

But perhaps the most interesting connection is the foundation's support of a unique college class that provides grants to local nonprofits while also teaching the art of giving. The Sunshine Lady Foundation provides \$10,000 annually to political science Professor Ken Menkhaus's "Philanthropy and the Non-Profit Sector" class. During the semester, students identify a cause, then design and carry out a grant program.

The foundation now partners with other universities across the country for similar courses, but Davidson was the first.

While Sunbeam grants go to organizations and individuals in desperate need, Ms. Buffett stressed that the grants are a "hand up, but not a handout." Rather than simply writing a check, the foundation establishes "a partnership for solving the problem," Ms. Buffett said.

Ms. Buffett also stressed the importance of female-led philanthropy. "If you get women together, anything can be done," said Ms. Buffett.

By DAVID BORAKS and KATHERINE JOHNSON

DavidsonNews.net

Philanthropist Doris Buffett thinks a lot about the best way to give away money. Keep grants small and local. Solve problems. And always ask: "How much do they pay their director?" She laid out those principles during a visit to Davidson College Tuesday, where she met with students and appeared in a public question-and-answer session at the college union.

As founder and president of the Sunshine Lady Foundation, Ms. Buffett oversees an organization dedicated to breaking cycles of poverty, domestic abuse and economic dependence. She doesn't give to arts groups or other causes that have established donor bases. And she describes her giving as "a hand up, not a hand out."

In a Q & A session with President Tom Ross at Davidson College on Tuesday night, she noted the differences between her approach, and that of her brother, billionaire investor Warren Buffett. She is a pioneer of "retail" grants, or small grants to individuals and small nonprofits which her organization deems "Sunbeam grants." The grants have lifted countless individuals out of poverty and

The Foundation has helped thousands of women struggling with domestic violence, but recently turned much of its attention to funding university-level prison education programs. Ms. Buffett funds programs at maximum security prisons like Sing Sing Correctional Facility in New York and Maine State Prison, where inmates take courses to obtain university-level degrees.

Ms. Buffett was inspired to fund such programs after attending a graduation ceremony at Sing Sing, where she saw firsthand how education had redeemed the lives of many prisoners.

"The experience was life-changing, which is a word I don't throw around lightly," Ms. Buffett said. Sunshine Foundation-funded programs have dramatically reduced recidivism rates at prisons where they've been implemented.

"Instead of figuring out how to make shivs, they're helping each other with their homework," Ms. Buffett said.

Doris Buffett on video

See a *DavidsonNews.net* video interview with Doris Buffett, "[4-min. interview: Doris Buffett on philanthropy](#)" ^[1]

Article printed from DavidsonNews.net: <http://davidsonnews.net>

URL to article: <http://davidsonnews.net/2010/01/13/philanthropist-doris-buffett-talks-about-the-art-of-giving/>

URLs in this post:

[1] "4-min. interview: Doris Buffett on philanthropy": <http://davidsonnews.net/2010/01/13/4-min-interview-doris-buffett-on-philanthropy/>

Copyright © 2009 DavidsonNews.net. All rights reserved.