Marcia Ragonetti
A Passion for the Arts and Philanthropy

Marcia Ragonetti admits that she’s passionate about singing, but if you spend any time with her, you’ll see that she’s passionate about many things. “I love singing. All kinds of singing. One of my favorite memories is singing opera hits, accompanied by the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, at Red Rocks,” she says. “The acoustics are phenomenal, and the performers pass through an amazing solid rock tunnel leading to the stage where all artists, past and present, sign their names – graffiti style. What special autographs!” The list includes opera stars, blues greats, and rock and roll icons.

Ragonetti came from a musical family and credits her high school choir teacher with steering her toward a vocal career. “When the teacher suggested that I had a potentially operatic voice, I started taking lessons,” she explains. “Then I became fascinated by all the dramatic stories and the opportunity to sing in foreign languages.” Ragonetti has been performing professionally for more than three decades, many of those years with Opera Colorado.

She also loves arts of all kinds, and would like to see a greater commitment to the arts in the community. “The pioneers who built Colorado included opera houses in all the mining towns,” she says. “This was their way of creating a community with varied cultural offerings.” Not surprisingly, Ragonetti is also an advocate for arts education. “The arts are an essential part of education, not just an add-on,” she explains. Studies show that arts education keeps students in school, teaches discipline, and brings a greater sense of humanity to their lives. “The arts make a huge difference in the kind of people we create,” she notes.

Recently, “Mezzo” Marcia (which is how her Colorado license plate has read for decades) has become passionate about philanthropy. “It’s a learned behavior,” she says. “In my family, I learned to give time through volunteering, but I wasn’t accustomed to making cash grants.” In 2010, she opened a donor-advised fund at The Denver Foundation, with the goal of learning how to invest wisely in the charitable causes that mean the most to her. “I want my son, Peter, to learn about giving back, too,” she explains. “He’s very creative in the industrial design field, and I want him to carry on the tradition of philanthropy after I’m gone.” Ragonetti has included a bequest to her fund, The M. L. Ragonetti Arts Education Fund, to continue the fund well into the future.

We thank Marcia Ragonetti for her passion for the arts, for her commitment to family philanthropy, and for her partnership with The Denver Foundation.

Family Philanthropy

Identifying shared goals

It’s one thing to claim your own charitable causes, but it can be quite another to get your whole clan to rally around a particular activity. When working with a group, including different generations of the same family, start with identifying the values you share.

After you’ve identified shared themes such as “compassionate,” “entrepreneurial,” or “innovative,” you can start to identify shared issue areas. These might include arts and culture, basic human needs, literacy, or youth development.

Consider working with an outside facilitator to drill down to the organizations where your values and goals intersect, and where you can work together as a group to make a difference.

Balancing group goals with individual interests

Family philanthropy is truly “for the whole family” if all voices are heard and everyone who wishes to participate is able to do so. In organizing your group giving, consider allotting resources so that you support your major, shared impact areas AND allow individuals to provide support for interests unique to them.

Also, let people share their talents and interests in their own unique ways. Tech-savvy students can create and update the family website, or write a blog about the charitable journey. Financial types can “do the numbers” for the group, from interpreting the financial statements of grantees to providing an update on investments and current market conditions. Detail-oriented people can research broad trends or specific organizations, or interpret the research offered by others.

There is a role for everyone in family philanthropy.