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Lending Hands

Carolyne Zinko and Suzanne Ennis | Photo: Peter DaSilva | December 4, 2018

Silicon Valley's diverse, committed and innovative philanthropists are forging new paths to hope and healing, from services for immigrants to new medical research to a center for the arts and more.

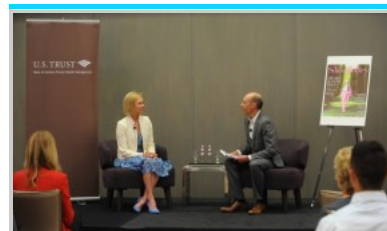


John and Marcia Goldman
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Scene In...



(/silicon-valley/scene/us-trust-presents-fireside-chat/img289194)

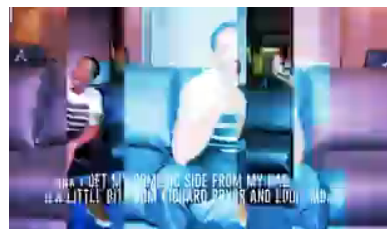
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Persian Partner

Bitra Daryabari assists Iranian immigrants with assimilation.

It has been 33 years since Bitra Daryabari's parents sent her as a teen to live with family in the United States for her safety after she refused to wear a hijab in her native Iran, but her sensitivity to injustice is still strong. A computer programmer with a master's in telecom management, the former wife of an early Google executive created the Unique Zan Foundation in 2006 to help women in the Middle East, built a girls' school in Kabul in 2007, and endowed Persian studies chairs at Stanford University and UC-Berkeley. After the Sept. 11 attacks, she created the [Pars Equality Center](http://parsequalitycenter.org) in San Jose, the only center in the nation devoted to helping Iranian Farsi speakers assimilate. Pars joined individuals and a civil rights group in a class action suit challenging the waiver component of the president's Muslim travel ban, saying so many people had been denied visas that the waiver amounted to "window dressing." Iranians have brought success to the U.S. as top executives at Google, Yahoo, Uber and Dropbox, she notes. Banning visits by grandmothers and families wanting to celebrate weddings or college graduations is not only wrong, she says, but "it's very prejudiced. It's inhuman. It's cruel."

Medical Momentum

The TESS Research Foundation helps families worldwide fight a rare disorder.

Kim and Zach Nye were in graduate school in England when their daughter, Tessa, was born and began having seizures hours after birth. Returning to Menlo Park, they worked for a decade with specialists who were unable to determine the cause. Two healthy daughters, Lily and Maggie, followed, but, in 2013, the couple's son, Colton, began having seizures hours after his birth too. With two sets of genetic information, researchers determined it wasn't an anomaly, but citrate transporter disorder, a genetic neurological disorder associated with the gene SLC13A5, and that both Kim and Zach were carriers. Although neither parent had a family history, both children suffer up to 100 epilepsylike seizures a day. The Nyes founded nonprofit [TESS Research Foundation](http://tesresearch.org) in 2015 and Silicon Valley researchers (Stanford neurologist Dr. Brenda Porter heads its scientific advisory board) and donors rallied. The nonprofit funds studies on treatment and cures and helps families worldwide with diagnoses. "They shouldn't have to go through what we went through—you just kind of wander around and suffer through it until you hopefully get to a diagnosis," Kim says. "I want to send a big love letter to the community. What we're doing is only because of their grace and generosity."

Head Trips

The Starlight Foundation brings escapist virtual-reality viewers to hospitalized kids.

For 35 years, [Starlight Children's Foundation](http://starlight.org) (<http://starlight.org>), has improved the hospital experience for sick kids. Now, thanks to Bay Area-based Starlight CEO Chris Helfrich, that experience might include an undersea adventure or intergalactic game—and less anxiety and pain. The key is Starlight Xperience, a new program conceived by Helfrich and developed with Google, Lenovo, Niagara Cares, Stanford's CHARIOT program and founding sponsor Star Wars: Force for Change (a Lucasfilm and The Walt Disney Co. charity program) that brings virtual reality into pediatric hospitals. Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford is already using the easy-to-clean headsets preloaded with curated VR content to entertain tykes as young as 6, and supplement or replace painkillers during minor procedures like shots and dressing changes. Starlight will distribute approximately 1,000 Starlight Xperience kits to 800 hospitals by year's end, and aims to double that in 2019. For Helfrich, a 15-plus-year veteran of nonprofits and father of three, seeing a child go from sad and bored to fully immersed and smiling is deeply rewarding. "Sick kids in the hospital are still kids," he says. "And we want to be able to provide all the wonder that childhood can bring, even if you happen to be stuck in the hospital."

Artistic License

Marcia and John Goldman plant the seeds for a new arts center in East Palo Alto.

Philanthropists John and Marcia Goldman are active around the globe—with his late parents' Goldman Environmental Prize, the Nobel Prize of the green world—and locally with projects that improve the quality of Bay Area life. Their latest is the [EPACenter Arts](http://epacenterarts.org) (<http://epacenterarts.org>), an art, design and music center in East Palo Alto, a minority community in Silicon Valley that has lacked such resources and opportunities since its incorporation in 1983. The John & Marcia Goldman Foundation pitched in \$3.5 million for 3 acres, and the couple is leading a \$50 million capital campaign to build the two-story, 25,000-square-foot facility by 2020. Instead of top-down planning, students were enlisted from the bottom up to survey their peers, which led to a collaborative design with WHY Architecture, down to the tiles on the walls. The name, also developed by students, is pronounced "epicenter." "This is really by the kids, for the kids," says Marcia. As a startup of sorts, potential donors may be skeptical. "Is it a risk? Of course it's a risk," John acknowledges. "But we think it's a pretty well-calculated risk because we've done our homework. We've done the background, and the community is ready and really wanting this."

Legacy of Largesse

Five decades of giving put Wilkes Bashford on the philanthropic map.

If [Wilkes Bashford](http://wilkesbashford.mitchellstores.com) (<http://wilkesbashford.mitchellstores.com>) named names, its clientele would be a who's who of Bay Area power players. But the luxury store does more than outfit the elite in Brunello Cucinelli (though it does so with unparalleled finesse). Its late eponymous founder had a 50-year legacy of hosting charity events for dozens of causes close to his heart—a tradition continued by the East Coast's Mitchell family, which added two Bay Area Wilkes Bashford boutiques to its holdings in 2009. "Both Wilkes historically and our family have always built our business on being financially and personally involved with our community," says Andrew Mitchell-Namdar, chief marketing executive for Mitchell Stores. "It's the lifeblood of our business." Among the company's many causes is the Wilkes Bashford Helping Hands Fund, co-founded by stores General Manager Jeff Garelick for victims of domestic violence. This season, shoppers can also support two breast cancer charities by purchasing exclusive pink Golden Goose sneakers designed for Mitchell Stores' 60th anniversary. After all, helping out is always in fashion. *450 Stanford Shopping Center, Palo Alto*

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