

Corporate Philanthropy Innovation Awards: Schnitzer Properties



A student gets a selfie with Schnitzer Properties President Jordan Schnitzer.

Part of being a productive, engaged community member is giving back.

As president of The Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation, Jordan Schnitzer knows firsthand that's both a duty and a joy. He has taken the charge to heart and built on his parents' legacy, funneling tremendous wealth into arts and civic institutions. But one of his biggest passions is helping students become future leaders.

After 27 years as CommuniCare, the foundation's grassroots, student-led grantmaking program is now called Schnitzer Cares, to reflect the Schnitzer family's philanthropic efforts to build strong, vibrant communities.

“Two philosophical statements define the Schnitzer Cares program: The riches of a city are its citizens, and to whom much is given, much is expected. Both those statements apply no matter what your social or economic standing in life is,” Schnitzer says.

The program set a record in the 2023-24 school year, with 1,800 high school-age students from 83 different school groups completing the Schnitzer Cares initiative and granting \$1.1 million to 143 Oregon nonprofits and school programs that they selected. Some of the recipients include Central City Concern, Animal Aid, Outside In, Crag Law Center and Bridge Meadows. Since the program's inception, 8,300 students have donated \$5.2 million of Schnitzer money to the things they care about.

This is how it works: The foundation staff coordinates with educators across five counties in Oregon. They help facilitate student groups, which choose a service area or pressing issue, create a mission statement, evaluate applications from local nonprofits, interview the nonprofits' representatives and then decide what to fund. Next, students get creative, brainstorming ways to raise money. Schnitzer Cares matches every dollar students raise times 10 – to a maximum gift of \$15,000.

Schnitzer is quick to point out that while the foundation is lucky to be in a position to help organize, manage and fund the program, it's all about the students and nonprofits – and therefore the community.

While Schnitzer Cares benefits local nonprofits financially, it leaves a bigger mark on Oregon youth who become neighborhood champions while building self-esteem and learning about charitable giving, accounting fundamentals, grant-making, public speaking, group dynamics and ultimately are inspired to continue community service into adulthood.

Former participants in the Schnitzer Cares program say it was one of the most memorable things they did in high school, creating a sense of unity and empathy. Some have been inspired to take public policy and planning courses in college or have decided to pursue careers in nonprofits.

“Every student that's in (Schnitzer Cares) has had a view through a kaleidoscope that shows them aspects of the community they may not have known about before. Therefore, like with every experience, they're forever changed. This change is one about how good it feels to give back. That can be imprinted through this program,” Schnitzer says.

While philanthropic giving doesn't eliminate inequality, it can help free untapped potential. The efforts and successes of the Schnitzer Cares program pave the way and encourage other donors to care about and contribute to their community.