

Newton Tab

Baby boomers can make a difference now and for the future

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GateHouse Media

Wed May 02, 2007, 12:00 AM EDT

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As we enter the intersection of the Boomers turning 60 and the longevity revolution, a term, which often referred to someone who was no longer with us, is suddenly taking on new life and meaning. That term is legacy. Legacy is not about the distant future ... it is about the way we lead our lives each and every day especially as we begin to think more about how we can “make a difference,” not only for today, but in ways that will last beyond our lifetimes.

Commitment to the well-being of future generations can take many forms. We may already be proud of the role we have played in the formation of our children’s lives or the mentoring of other young people, our contributions at work and to the organizations we have belonged to. But there may still be a lingering feeling of wanting to make other significant contributions that will truly impact the next generation ... whether at home, in our community or in society at-large.

The problem is we often don’t take the time to consider the legacy that we would be proud to leave. And even if we have, we might not actually take the steps to create it. That was not true for a group of very inspiring individuals who spoke at a recent public forum at Discovering What’s Next in Newton. “Legacy stories” were shared by people such as Alan Greenfield, who started a public awareness campaign for Save Darfur, modeling for teenagers, that “one man can truly make a difference.” We also heard about the rippling effects throughout Doris Birmingham’s family of the work she has done to capture the essence of her family members on audio and videotape to preserve and pass down their legacy. Judy Cockerton, founder of the Treehouse Foundation, captivated the audience with her story of how she has transformed a personal experience into a social cause to fundamentally change the way we view and care for the 800,000 children who experience foster care in America.

In thinking about legacy each person needs to consider what matters most in their life ... what are they drawn to ... what inspires them. No legacy effort should be considered too small. Think of the pleasure that some of you may have had in owning a treasured family cookbook or a collection of family letters written back and forth during WWII, or artwork created by family

members passed on to future generations. Some people may choose a more traditional path to “making a difference” through philanthropy or charitable giving.

By the year 2055, \$41 trillion will change hands as Americans pass their accumulated assets from one generation to next. This transfer will include gifts to heirs as well as gifts to charities. A study by Paul Servish at Boston College found that people are making philanthropy a priority, seeing charitable giving as a way to achieve happiness for themselves, their families and others. During the last 10 years, philanthropy has become more participatory/entrepreneurial — engaged philanthropy. You don’t need to be Bill Gates to be a philanthropist. Gifts of relatively small amounts of money can have a profound impact on nonprofit organizations, especially small grass roots community ones. It’s very exciting to see how donors’ interests can match an organization’s needs to have an impact on an organization’s mission.

Also, there has been more family-focused giving with parents passing their values and interests to the next generation and encouraging their children to develop charitable interests of their own. Fortunately, there are resources and professionals available to help you through this process, which begins, with questions like: Who am I? What’s important to me? What are my priorities and goals? Philanthropic advisors provide helpful tools for values clarification and determining philanthropic priorities. Life planning consultants and values-based financial and estate planners also offer a process that helps to integrate your own values and passions in developing a legacy plan. This may result in a giving plan for now and the future or a written document such as an ethical will designed to transmit family values, stories and hopes to the next generation.

Discovering What’s Next wants to help you move from inspiration to action and in May will offer four workshops on creating your own legacy, giving circles, legacy planning for grandchildren and recording your life stories on video. To learn more or to register for these workshops, visit the DWN Web site at www.discoveringwhatsnext.com.

Legacy is a way of thinking about the world and our place in it, a way to align our values with our actions, a way to join together to create something that will better the world.

By looking at how we each might want to be remembered, what is essential in each of our lives comes into focus. We begin to understand that the gift of time granted to the Boomer generation is an opportunity to use our knowledge, wisdom, vitality, passion or position in life to contribute to the next generation and find a sense of completion within ourselves.

Beth Tishler, a longtime Newton resident and nonprofit consultant, and Cyndi Jones, a life planning coach and consultant, co-chaired the Discovering What’s Next Legacy Program. For more information about the Legacy Workshops, call the DWN HUB at the Newton Free Library at 617-796-1419.