

# Setting a High Bar with Her Giving

*Philanthropist and Dallas businesswoman Lyda Hill says her partnership with The Pew Charitable Trusts allows her to help transform the world through science-based research and advocacy.*

BY DANIEL LEDUC

FROM HER 46TH-FLOOR OFFICE IN Dallas, Lyda Hill can see her hometown thriving. There is the new Klyde Warren Park—five acres of green grass and shade trees atop an eight-lane freeway through downtown—the Perot Museum of Nature and Science, and the spectacular suspended Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, named for her philanthropist mother. Lyda Hill was a patron of the projects, which are helping to revitalize her community.

The self-described “serial entrepreneur” is a successful businesswoman who developed the Fort Worth Stockyards as a shopping and tourist destination, who created Texas’ largest travel agency, and whose grandfather was legendary oilman H.L. Hunt. Her impact on Dallas has been generous and visible.

In recent years, she has sought to expand her philanthropy in ways that might not be as immediately visible but will be just as lasting, with the potential to transform the world.

“It’s kind of fun to do the impossible,” Walt Disney once said. Hill likes the quote and embraces the notion. “I don’t get interested in something that can be done easily,” she says.

Hill had already decided to give away all of her money before she died when she signed the Giving Pledge promoted by fellow philanthropists

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Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates. The pledge is a commitment by the world’s wealthiest individuals and families to dedicate the majority of their wealth to philanthropy. She liked the advice Buffett gave her when they spoke: “He said, ‘Don’t do what others can do and what others will do. Do what they can’t do and won’t do. Be a risk taker and be bold.’”

A year before she signed the pledge, she had begun to look for new philanthropic opportunities. Her wealth adviser told her about The Pew Charitable Trusts,

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which, through its public policy initiatives and donor partnerships, seeks to make government more efficient in serving citizens and responsive to society’s ever-changing challenges, and to preserve the world’s natural resources. But that is getting ahead of the Lyda Hill story.

HEALTH CONSCIOUS AND TRIM FROM her regular workouts on an elliptical machine, Hill embraces life with a palpable enthusiasm. She spends her time in Texas and Colorado, which she has

visited every summer since childhood. She has traveled to more than 140 countries and has amassed a world-class mineral collection that is displayed at the Perot museum and her Dallas office. She now is devoting herself nearly full time to philanthropy, which she says is a natural evolution for someone from her family.

“I didn’t know voluntarism was voluntary, because my mother always took me along when she volunteered,” she says. “My family has always made contributions and supported things.”

Schooled in mathematics, she wanted to be able to measure the impact of her giving. She also has always had an interest in the life sciences—an interest that was heightened after she survived breast cancer and decided that her Lyda Hill Foundation would seek to advance knowledge in nature and science.

Her business interests today also include a focus on science. Among them are Reditex Ventures, which invests in early biomedical research by universities and health care institutions in Texas and Colorado with the aim of getting promising advances to the marketplace quickly. Hill also is a leader in

Dallas’ most important charities, including the Junior League, the Crystal Charity Ball, which supports nonprofit groups in the region, and the Visiting Nurse Association. She made the largest contribution in U.S. history to a girls’ school by a living alumna with her \$20 million gift in 2011 to her alma mater, Dallas’ Hockaday School, and the largest contribution to the University of Texas’ M.D. Anderson Cancer Center’s Moon Shots Program with a \$50 million donation in May.



**Seeing how her philanthropy helped trans-form Dallas, Lyda Hill now is supporting ambitious projects with the potential for global impact.**

Hill says both her nonprofit and for-profit activities inform her philanthropic philosophy, allowing her to apply a business approach to her generosity. “Giving away money in a meaningful way is more difficult than making money,” she explains. “But there are things about them that are the same—you have to figure what’s right and maximize the results.”

That was one reason she joined the Giving Pledge. She says the group has encouraged her ambition to achieve even more impact from her philanthropy. “I want to do big things,” she says.

As Hill was looking for the right opportunity to advance her philanthropic vision, she was introduced to Pew President Rebecca Rimel. Through

their conversations, it quickly became clear that Hill’s interests meshed with Pew’s work. She was looking for ambitious projects, and Pew takes on big challenges.

“Lyda is truly an extraordinary philanthropist who sees where transformational change can occur,” says Rimel. “She has become a valued partner who inspires us to reach for and often exceed our shared goals.”

Hill’s first investment with the institution was to join Global Ocean Legacy, a partnership of funders who work together to create great parks in the seas. They have helped to double the amount of ocean habitat worldwide that

is protected comprehensively, including the largest marine reserve in the world, the Chagos archipelago in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Having seen measurable results from that partnership, Hill was interested in continuing the collaboration.

Inspired by her interest in science and the environment, Hill decided to support Pew’s campaign to protect the international waters of the central Arctic Ocean. And she has become a major contributor to Pew’s Global Campaign to End Illegal Fishing, which is seeking to end illegal fishing operations that take advantage of weak enforcement and patchy laws and regulations. Il-



**With Lyda Hill's support, Pew's Global Ocean Legacy partnership helped win protection for the Chagos Archipelago, which includes Middle Brother Island (top) and rich marine life.**

legal, unreported, and unregulated fishing jeopardizes the environment and costs the global economy up to \$23.5 billion each year.

“What makes Lyda so remarkable is that she thinks on a grand scale and she is a risk-taker—as long as she is convinced those risks have been well thought through and are manageable,”

says Executive Vice President Joshua Reichert, who heads Pew's environmental projects. “Her profound generosity has accomplished much already and is making possible essential work that will have global impact.”

In addition to environmental projects, Hill has become a partner on Pew's work to foster drug and medical device

innovation by focusing on improving the efficiency of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which is responsible for ensuring the safety and effectiveness of medical products. And she is supporting a Pew-led campaign to ensure that a historic overhaul of the FDA's food safety law is fully implemented to prevent foodborne illnesses, which sicken an estimated 48 million Americans each year.

“I like working with Pew,” she says. “They see a problem, identify what can be done about it, and can tell you what the measures of success are. It is a lot easier when I'm not starting from scratch. The FDA and the ocean reserves—you know something needs to be done, but it's hard to define. Pew puts definitions on them.”

“We are honored to collaborate with visionary partners like Lyda. When we combine our skills and resources with those of others, we can have tremendous impact,” says Senior Vice President Sally O'Brien, who directs philanthropic partnerships at Pew. “Lyda's willingness to take on big challenges is inspirational, both to us and others in the philanthropic community.”

Hill receives frequent status reports on her partnerships with Pew, but sometimes news developments are so big that they find their way to her on their own. On a recent morning, she sat down to breakfast, flipped open the *Dallas Morning News*, and found a story about leaders from eight nations, including Secretary of State John Kerry, meeting to discuss how to protect the Arctic as the ice there thaws and opens the way to more commercial shipping. “That wouldn't be happening if Pew weren't putting this campaign together,” Hill says. “I read that and thought, ‘Oh, I had something to do with that.’” ■

For information about philanthropic partnerships at Pew, please contact senior vice president Sally O'Brien at 202-540-6525, sobrien@pewtrusts.org.