Front Porch supports education

Front Porch is a Sonora software company doing business around the world, but its charitable giving focuses on Tuolumne County with the help of the Sonora Area Foundation.

“They’ve made it possible to help meet needs in the community,” said CEO Zach Britton, who launched Front Porch in 1998 with co-founder Derek Maxson. “We’ve enjoyed working with them and they’ve helped us expand our vision.”

The majority of Front Porch’s giving is education-related, including a specific fund at the Sonora Area Foundation that covers 10 full scholarships to Columbia College and five $16,000 scholarships to students at four-year colleges pursuing math and science degrees each year.

The company also funds a variety of “mini-grants” every month from applications selected by the funding committee of the Front Porch Foundation.

“Let’s say a teacher needs $1,000 to pay for a bus to the Monterey Aquarium,” Britton said. “They submit the request on the Web and then it goes to our committee, which then considers the application.” Community arts and nature trails are among other Front Porch favorites, but “education is by far the biggest,” Britton said.

Most of the company’s donations are coordinated through the Sonora Area Foundation. The Front Porch management team meets each December to determine how much the company is able to give based on the year’s financial results.

“My business does not have a straight line – we have amazing days and we have hard days,” Britton said. “In any given year, we look at the books and see what we can do to support the local community, then we give a check to the Sonora Area Foundation. From that point forward, they’re very easy to work with. They hold the money in perpetuity and

Family fund established

A long-time Tuolumne County family has found a way to facilitate their charitable giving. Sonora native Charles Segerstrom and his wife, Kate, have established the Charles and Kate Segerstrom Family Fund at the Sonora Area Foundation, allowing them to simplify their giving while continuing to support their favorite non-profit organizations and realizing tax advantages at the same time.

“We had some appreciated stock available for contribution, and rather than figure out how to split the proceeds, we put it all in a Foundation fund for distribution,” Charles explained. “We get the full value for a tax deduction and the Sonora Area Foundation gets 100 percent of the dollar amount.”

Columbia College will be a major focus of the new Segerstrom fund.

“We’ve been associated with supporting the college for quite some time,” Charles noted. His father, William, spearheaded the extended family’s donation of the college’s Segerstrom Arboretum and Nature Trail in 1980, while his uncle’s estate funded the Charles Segerstrom Jr. Memorial Amphitheater.

Charles now sits on the board of the Columbia College Foundation.

In March, the college foundation approved a new program, the Promise Scholarship, which will provide funding for any public high school graduate in Tuolumne County who wants to attend Columbia College full time. Graduates of Bret Harte High School in Angels Camp also will be eligible since the college operates a satellite campus in Calaveras County.

Tuition and enrollment fees will be waived for all Promise Scholarship recipients for two consecutive semesters immediately following graduation.

The first scholarships will be awarded in the fall of 2018 to coincide with the college’s 50th anniversary celebration.

The Segerstrom fund also will contribute to the Sierra Business Council, of which Charles is a board member, and various other entities he and his wife have traditionally supported, such as the hospital and theaters.

“We’re using this fund as a mechanism to

(Continued on page 3)
President James L. “Jim” Johnson retired from the Sonora Area Foundation Board of Directors at its annual meeting in April after 12 years of service, including eight as president. This was his final term allowed under Foundation bylaws. “The board was extremely complimentary of Jim’s tenure and appreciative of his leadership over the last eight years,” said Executive Director Darrell Slocum.

Johnson was born and raised in the East Bay and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a degree in business administration. After retiring from a career of nearly 40 years in the medical equipment industry, he and his wife, Pat, moved to Twain Harte full time in 1999.

His family’s connection to the area dates back to the early 1940s, when they bought a cabin in Twain Harte and started spending weekends and summers there. Johnson met his wife while lifeguarding at Twain Harte Lake. They have one daughter and three grandchildren.

Newly elected to the board at the same meeting was Derek Maxson, co-founder of Front Porch, a technology company in Sonora that delivers solutions for Internet providers worldwide, and co-author of seven patents in Internet technologies. Prior to Front Porch, he was part of the launch team to publish the original web site for The Union Democrat. He is an avid mountain biker, tennis player and enjoys strumming his guitar.

Maxson has been a member of the board of Sierra Bible Church and Sierra Waldorf School and holds a masters of arts degree from Multnomah University in Portland, Oregon. He and his wife, Christy, moved to Sonora in 1995 and have three daughters.

The board also congratulated Program Manager Lin Freer on her 20th anniversary with the Sonora Area Foundation in March, noting that her contributions to the Foundation and community are immeasurable.
Giving Back

Front Porch supports education

(continued from page 1)

make it possible for us to provide steady support to programs over many years, regardless of what our financial results might be in any given year. And we get the tax deductions up front, which helps too.”

Britton said he would “absolutely” recommend that other companies utilize the Sonora Area Foundation to coordinate their charitable giving.

“They take care of everything,” he said. “With the scholarships, they track all the details, verify the transcripts and cut the checks. That would be a lot of work for us. They do a great job of doing all the legwork and they don’t charge any fees. I’m always glad to talk to anyone about my experiences with them.”

With offices in Sonora and Beijing, Front Porch is the largest browser-based messaging company in the world. It allows Internet service providers to communicate directly with specific customers through a patented in-browser floating overlay notification system.

“That’s a little niche, but it’s our niche," Britton said.

This summer, Front Porch will move from the Indian Rock Center into the building that was home to the Serenity Spa at 905 Mono Way, next to Rite Aid in Sonora.

Britton was born in Woodland but came to Sonora often to visit his grandparents, Harvey and Helen McGee, long-time publishers of The Union Democrat.

“I didn’t care for Sonora too much at the time,” he admits. “I thought it was too hot and had poison oak and I got stung by scorpions. But it’s been a great place to live and raise a family.”

The McGees also had a long tradition of charitable giving without public fanfare.

“My grandfather really loved the community, as did my grandmother, and it’s fun to follow that legacy," Britton said.

He and Maxson, who was raised near San Diego, moved to Sonora with their families to create the newspaper’s first website, which went online in 1997. A year later, they launched Front Porch. Customers today include Time Warner Cable, Comcast, Cox, Great Wall Broadband and many more in 35 countries around the world.

Britton and his wife, Holly, have four children, Ian, Adria, Ellie and Elias. Maxson and his wife, Christy, have three daughters, Katie, Grace and Renee.

Applications for a Front Porch educational or non-profit mini-grant are available online at www.frontporchfoundation.org.

Sonora Area Foundation has produced a new round of their popular shopping bags. These were distributed at the Senior Family Forum in May. Please come by the office to get your complimentary bag or watch them at Foundation events.
Sonora Area Foundation executive director Darrell Slocum, kicks off the Senior Family Forum with a welcome, introductions and thank yous to community supporters.