

Notes from the President: Passages (Winter 2005-2006 Trust magazine)

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Albert Barnes, the physician and chemist who collected works of art in the first half of the 20th century and placed them, for all time, in The Barnes Foundation, was ahead of his contemporaries in his eye for modern paintings and his vision of how all people could learn to understand art. He was, without doubt, totally devoted to his institution and sought to provide it a secure future.

Time proved him prescient on the quality of his world-renowned collection. But it was less kind to the legal and administrative structure that he laid out to assure the foundation's permanence and the access to its galleries of those he called "the plain people." Tragically, the Barnes eventually faced insolvency.

The foundation now has a new lease on life. Its board requested and was granted court permission to operate in a manner consistent with sound, 21st-century nonprofit practices. Dr. Barnes's plan for a durable base will come to fruition with the expansion of the Barnes's board and an endowment to sustain its programs.

And the galleries will move to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia— a central location where visitors will be introduced to Dr. Barnes's unique approach to art appreciation. These changes will also assure that this public trust will be accessible to individuals from all walks of life, as he intended.

The excitement about the Barnes has also affected Philadelphia, which is enjoying its own reinvention. Residents and tourists are discovering the city as a hub of culture and heritage through both our established institutions and the local artists producing today's cutting-edge work. The Trusts is committed to all facets of our cultural community, and we are proud when folks say of our hometown, "It's so hot, it's cool!"

Time also plays a role in the balance of power between the federal government and the states, since, by turns throughout our nation's history, one or the other has been more dominant. This fluctuation, if not balance, was built into our Constitution.

Currently, the states are shouldering the responsibility for many policy areas that previously were a federal concern. Recognizing that trend, the Trusts five years ago began to identify issues in which our investments could advance the debate. We drew upon the experience of our work at the national level that had immediate relevance for state policy discussions. Our initial efforts demonstrated the benefits of prekindergarten for all three- and four-year-olds, tracked state

election reform and analyzed changes in voting technology, and ensured fairness in the states' systems of capital punishment.

Now, building on stated-focused initiatives, we have created a new operating unit, the Pew Center on the States. It will draw on the Trusts' institutional expertise in strategically identifying issues and advancing solutions effectively and efficiently in and across 50 different policy environments. The result we anticipate will be a resource that informs discussions and supports the states in serving their citizens.

Individuals no less than institutions must change with the passage of time, and one of the ways in which many individuals have not prepared is in paying attention to their retirement savings. Yesterday, employers were in charge of their workers' pensions. Today, with 401(k)s and other savings instruments, we as individuals are increasingly in charge of planning for our financial future.

Yet the Trusts' Retirement Security Project has documented that, while many moderate- and lower-income workers are not doing a good job of building a nest egg, they want to save. RSP recommends common-sense incentives that will make that goal easier to reach.

Implementation of RSP's reform ideas could increase savings and security without creating a new government bureaucracy. And facilitating policy changes now can forestall further dependence on government programs for support—no small concern with 75 million baby boomers approaching retirement.

Finally, the Trusts kept pace with change when we became a public charity last year. We had the flexibility to choose that course, pursue it, receive court approval and—importantly—follow up strongly on these new opportunities because of the vision and commitment of our board. Sadly, that board is now reduced by one member, Dr. Thomas W. Langfitt, who served from 1980 until he died in August.

A distinguished neurosurgeon, Dr. Langfitt will be remembered especially for his wide-ranging curiosity, probing questions and unrelenting support for the Trusts' role in serving the public interest. Along with his neurosurgical career, he called his association with the Trusts the most intellectually exciting activity of his life. He enjoyed being part of the leadership of an institution that addresses important issues and, as the times evolve, reevaluates, rethinks and reinvents itself for the future.

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