

LEGACY CIRCLE HIGHLIGHT: RON & MAELEY TOM



Interview with Ron Tom

Tell us about yourself and how/when you were introduced to My Sister's House and their work

I became aware of My Sister's House when they started the program. We had been financial supporters because we believe in the mission statement and the goal that they were trying to achieve.

We (my wife and I) got even more involved— and our daughter too. We asked Nilda, “How can we improve the holidays for those staying in the Safe Haven?” knowing that it could be a little lonely. During Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, we would go to the Safe Haven and bring toys for the kids and decorations.

During a different fundraiser, we became aware of the stress and pressure on the Board members to constantly raise funds for My Sister's House. This is when I suggested to Nilda: My Sister's House should get involved in some type of business venture that would generate money and reduce some of this stress that the Board members had. Shortly after this, Nilda asked me to join the Board and champion a business enterprise. As a Board member, I had 2 goals: 1) push for a business venture that turned out to be My Sister's House Cafe and 2) be part of the nominating committee for My Sister's House Board.

In the creation of My Sister's House Cafe, we talked with the community and other non-profit groups to see what they were doing (i.e., retail ventures, luncheons). We hosted a contest with the universities and colleges where students submitted their proposal to: what would be the best business venture. The winners were students from UC Davis Business School. We received a great amount of support from community members, especially Liz from Bella Bru and the Frank Fat Family.

In being part of the nominating committee for the Board, I advised that we needed more people from the community in business and entrepreneurship to support our Board's goal to raise money.

Now, the resources that can be tapped by the Board are pretty extensive. Once you get involved with My Sister's House, you don't leave it and do something else. In the 9-10 years that I was on the Board, the My Sister's House Cafe did not raise large amounts of money, but it put a face of My Sister's House in the community. It provided a physical place in the community for people to see the mission, to see our work. Individuals from non-profits and other organizations started holding their meetings at the cafe. Now, we are in the process of opening up the fourth shelter, the Amanah House, and the second social enterprise, My Sister's Treasures.

What motivates you to give to My Sister's House?

The mission. Understanding the difficulty to achieve this mission. Everyone thinks that Asians are all the same, but there are generational conflicts between the subgroups; it's difficult to unite all Asians under one category. And, with the situations that these women get involved in—no fault of their own—it's difficult to figure out how to help them. One of the big things that My Sister's House provides is job *training*. We had to divide our staff so that the women could be trained in-language. Then, if the women leave their spouses, we continue to provide them with resources.

My wife has been a community activist in the Asian community since the 1970's and has started a lot of programs and been involved in many organizations. I was not as involved until my retirement, so one of my goals was to offer my experiences and expertise to groups that needed it. I used to be a pharmacist and then became a lobbyist. On rare occasions, I would go to the County Board of Supervisors to advocate for county dollars to go towards domestic violence issues. I'd like to share my experiences and hopefully some wisdom.

How do you envision your gift commitment supporting/impacting the clients we serve?

I've always told Nilda: I'll give My Sister's House money, you do what you think is best to do. I don't need it to go to a particular program. It should go where it can be utilized in its best capacity. I know that there will no waste and always put it to good use

Why should others join the Legacy Circle?

It's for a good cause. For older people who have more time (and if they have more money), it is very important for us to look at the community and see where we can be helpful and support good causes. There are a lot of good causes and good people doing the work. Asians in particular like to give to their children, which is admirable too. But, if the children are doing well, it's good to look at the community.

If you see the need for it, if you have the financial capacity, then look around and get involved. You see refugees and immigrants coming and they need help. My Sister's House always ends up doing more than just domestic violence support like human trafficking, sexual assault, and others. Looking at the demographics of the shelters, it's always changing.

It's a good thing to do and it's the right thing to do. Share your time. Share your wealth. People need help— if you are in a position to help others, you should do that.

