

sparkventures

business driven philanthropy

FOUNDERS REPORT

Summer 2017



LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

A Note from Rich Johnson, CEO & Cofounder, Spark Ventures

I've been a student of leadership for as long as I can remember. Leaders influence each one of us - no matter our age, background or where we live. Leadership author Max DePree says "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant."

We are so fortunate at Spark Ventures to have servant leaders helping to define reality - working collaboratively to refine, plan and execute our vision. In particular, I am excited to highlight a strategy conversation with board members and a few of the many amazing women who lead at Spark Ventures and with our partners.

As we head into our 10 year anniversary this coming fall, I personally want to express my deep gratitude to every leader and every person who has contributed to our first decade of impact. Whether you donated time, money, skills or connections - your partnership is the engine that keeps Spark alive and helping to transform communities around the world.

Twa to tala, gracias, thank you.

INSIDE THIS EDITION...

Strategy Conversation

An interview with board leaders highlighting developments in our strategy initiative and the vision for the next decade of Spark Ventures.

Women at the Helm

We are proud to have women in leadership roles at every level of our organization. We highlight a few here.

Interview: Brian Wu

We sat down with returning board member Brian Wu to learn why he is reinvigorated by our work and excited for what is to come.

AND MORE...



A SPARK STRATEGY CONVERSATION

Over the last year, our leadership engaged in a strategy initiative to prepare for the next decade. Spark supporters have been uniquely drawn to our organization for its partnerships and focus on business driven philanthropy. Will anything about these two important aspects change? Our Marketing Manager, Stephanie Denzer spoke with board leaders, Kathy Wolf and Scott Barbeau, to get their thoughts on the exciting developments ahead.

Stephanie: Deep relationships with our partners are key to Spark's success. Will that be changing in the future?

Kathy: Spark Ventures IS the partnerships. Our impact with Hope in Zambia and Las Tías in Nicaragua- it's been realized over time, through a long-term commitment and that's not going to change. Yet our goal in the coming years is to broaden our reach even further because there are so many communities that would benefit from a partnership with Spark. We intend to continue to walk alongside our first two partners, while identifying new opportunities that align with our approach.

Stephanie: Is there anything about Spark's approach or model that you see changing?

Scott: As most people know, we launched large agribusinesses with Hope and Las Tías, and we remain committed to the success of those projects. Moving forward, we plan to stay aligned with a business driven philanthropy approach and our values of empowerment and local sustainability, but we are identifying ways that require less capital, time and fewer human resources from Spark.

Stephanie: Can you give us an example of what that might look like?

Scott: In addition to program support, we'd be helping to build on existing income generators, rather than launching large new businesses. For example, Las Tías has a successful revolving fund for parents of the students in their program. The parents receive small loans from this fund to start a business and the interest from loan repayments help Las Tías cover operational expenses and salaries. We could help expand the fund - creating more small businesses, jobs and sustainability for Las Tías. And as we've started to identify potential new partners for Spark, we've found numerous organizations already using business to drive social impact and Spark can come alongside to help them grow their impact.

Stephanie: Lastly, how does Spark grow its fundraising over the next 10 years?

Kathy: It starts with appreciation, and on behalf of the board of directors, I want to thank each person who has given to Spark Ventures. We wouldn't be here without you. And I believe we grow our support base through more people seeing our partnerships firsthand. The importance of our impact travel experiences was one of the big takeaways from our strategy work and I can attest to it personally. This summer my husband and kids will travel back to Zambia with me for my 4th trip. You can't underestimate how these trips create ambassadors and help connect resources. Trips that build connections are powerful and key to Spark's future.

WOMEN AT THE HELM

From chairing our Board of Directors to managing our grassroots, community partner organizations, women are in key decision-making roles and will continue to lead the charge as we move into our second decade of impact. We are excited to feature a few of these incredible leaders here...



"I am proud to work alongside so many talented women as we work to empower future female leaders around the world."

PATTI O'NEIL
Board of Directors, Chair



"My favorite part of my job is being the first to teach the little ones their alphabet and numbers."

GRISELDA PANTOJA
Las Tias Leader & Educator, Spark Ventures Partner



MARGARET MUMBA
Co-Founder, Hope Ministries
Spark Ventures Partner



STEPHANIE DENZER
Marketing Manager,
Spark Ventures Staff



JULIE TAFEL KLAUS
Partners Committee,
Board of Directors

There isn't nearly enough room here to feature all the incredible women who make our work possible. For a more comprehensive look, check out:

sparkventures.org/womenatthehelm



SAVE the DATE

Spark Ventures' 10th Anniversary Celebration

Thursday, October 12, 2017 • 6-9pm

The Ivy Room
12 E Ohio St., Chicago

Save the date and join us in Chicago in October for Spark Ventures' 10 Year Anniversary Celebration. We will have special guests joining us (announcements coming soon). Not in Chicago? We also anticipate hosting a few regional events around the country so more of you have the chance to help us celebrate this decade of impact.

We're selling a limited number of premium tables to the Chicago celebration. Get yours here: sparkventures.org/spark10.

INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN WU

One of our newest board members isn't actually all that new. Brian Wu has been a Spark Ventures supporter since our early days. We recently sat down with him to hear why he's newly invigorated by our work.

You've been a Spark supporter for quite some time and recently re-joined the board after a break. What brought you back?

I've known the Spark co-founders since the beginning and love how Spark has been innovative with their approach to international philanthropy. Family and work pulled me away for a few years but Rich called me last year to share some of the future strategy work in progress and asked if I'd consider stepping back on to contribute to the process. It's been rewarding and I'm excited for the months ahead as we begin to implement the plan!



You recently sent a few of your employees on one of our impact trips to Nicaragua. What was your motivation and what has type of impact do you see?

I want our employees to experience the power of building cross-cultural relationships, learning and giving back. I know it will inspire them, make them better employees, better people. As they've returned, I see a lot of interest from others to participate and overall, there's a growing commitment for our company to engage in the type of partnerships that Spark Ventures offers.

You have had the benefit of watching (and helping) Spark Ventures grow over many years. What accomplishment are you most proud of?

We've engaged our employees and clients in annual events that have generated over \$100,000 to support the work of Spark Ventures over the last five years. I'm most proud that this funding has gone to provide education, nutrition and create jobs. It's our contribution to helping to lift communities out of poverty... and we're privileged to have the opportunity to be a part of it through Spark.

You mentioned your family - what's happening on that front and how does Spark fit into that?

Well, my wife Ali and I are about to have our fourth child - all are under 6 years old. Ali is a doctor and has also had the opportunity to spend time in developing countries and we know the importance of the work that Spark and its partners do. We look forward to introducing our children to this work through a trip with Spark in the future.



75,000 Plantain Trees

Harvesting of the plantain trees is underway at our joint-venture farm in the lush hills of Matagalpa, Nicaragua.



2,450 New Textbooks

Thanks to support from Lincoln Park Preschool and other supporters, Hope School received new textbooks for all subjects.



May Clinic in Zambia

Our annual partnership with North Park University has again resulted in medical treatment for 400+ students, staff & community members.

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