

VYING FOR DONOR DOLLARS
CRAFTING ONE GEM AT A TIME

FARMING ALL WINTER LONG
HOLIDAYS IN STOCKBRIDGE

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The Price We Pay

SURVIVAL OF ESSENTIAL NON-PROFITS RESTS SQUARELY WITH DONORS

IT'S 7:47 A.M., September 28, day six of WAMC Northeast Public Radio's epically grueling fall fund drive, and the commander of this enterprise, Alan Chartock, the Berkshires' most unabashed beseecher of tax-deductible donations, has an idea. Taking a brief break from the microphone inside the radio station's no-frills studio in Albany, the Great Barrington resident removes his headset, stands up, and summons the attention of the 20 or so volunteers manning the phone lines. "OK, gang," he says, rocking on his heels, "here's what I'm going to do."

For a \$100 contribution, Chartock tells his crew, listeners will receive not only a hand-crank radio but also a CD of Pete Seeger live in concert. Listeners will have 30 minutes to act on Chartock's giveaway.

In unison, and with just a hint of kindly sarcasm, the volunteers sound out a collective "Ahhhhh."

Back on air, Chartock, a maestro of momentum and megahertz, makes the pitch—a pitch with punch facilitated in no small part by the sheer fact that WAMC transmits from a tower high atop Massachusetts' tallest mountain, Mount Greylock. And

BY FELIX CARROLL // PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILIP KAMRASS



HER COMMUNITY "I can really walk around Great Barrington and feel 'This really is my community' because I have actually touched different pieces of it," says Sally Eagle, who isn't super rich but has put some money from an inheritance into supporting what she calls "mom-and-pop" non-profits, including arts and social services.



just like that—the phones start ringing, and the whole room erupts and mobilizes like a submarine crew under attack.

“Everyone on phones!” Chartock shouts. “If there’s anyone in this building who can handle a phone, get in here!”

As donations pour in, Chartock reads off the names: “Thanks to Don Menard of Pittsfield ... Jean in Williamstown ... Come on, people, let’s end this fund drive now. ... 1-800-323-9262 ...”

If it all sounds like begging, of course it’s begging. “We are all beggars,” says Robert Norris, co-founder of Berkshire South Regional Community Center in Great Barrington, speaking for the nearly 350 non-profits in Berkshire County, many of which would not exist save for benefactors. While the county’s non-profits engage in a decidedly softer sell than Chartock’s, their appeals are no less impassioned, no less fraught with angst and alarm.

This being the holiday season, with December the make-or-break month for many non-profits that rely on end-of-year, tax-deductible giving, it’s understood that “begging” will abound. Considering the alternative, few venture to criticize. With the high-profile, decades-long demise of the county’s once mighty manufacturing sector, officials agree that if not for the more than 24,000 full- and part-time jobs now directly or indirectly supported by non-profits, the Berkshires would be reduced to a poor, rural outpost.

The non-profit sector—which includes arts and culture, education, environmental, religious, and health- and human-services organizations—accounts for roughly 25 percent of the total purchase of goods and services in Berkshire County, according to a study prepared for the Berkshire County Chamber of Commerce and released last year. Moreover, the non-profit

**ENOUGH TO GO AROUND?
WAMC Public Radio raises \$1 million three times a year, “and an incredible amount of it comes from the Berkshires,” says station president Alan Chartock, far right. Robert Norris, middle, supports Berkshire South because it’s the sort of community center he grew up with in Iowa. Above, Susan Wissler has guided The Mount toward stable financial footing.**

sector draws 674,000 visitors annually and directly or indirectly generates more than \$2.2 billion each year. And, by the way, our ratio of non-profits per resident—nearly 30 per 10,000 people—is the highest in the state and more than double the national average, according to the study. Economically, non-profits sustain us. Culturally and civically, they define us.

“Stop and think for a minute,” says Norris of Great Barrington. “Where would we be without the Clark Museum or Jacob’s Pillow

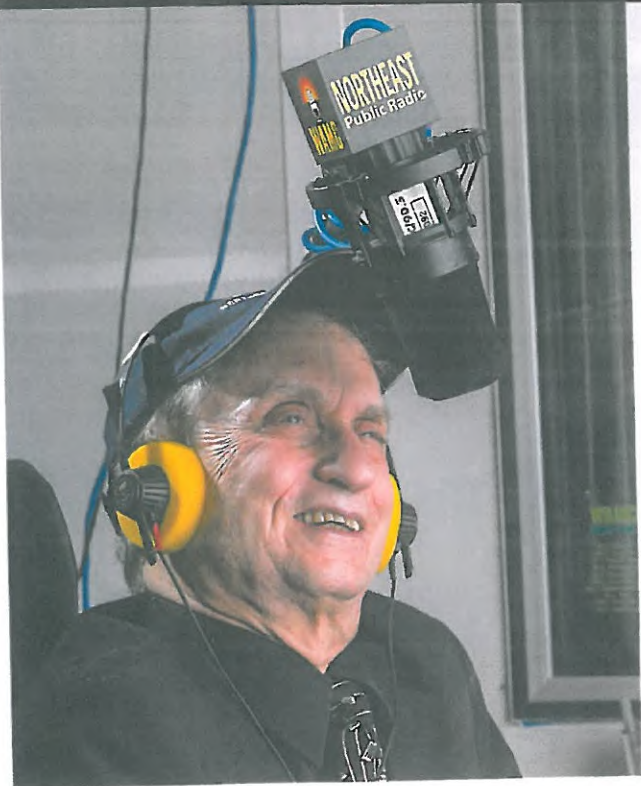
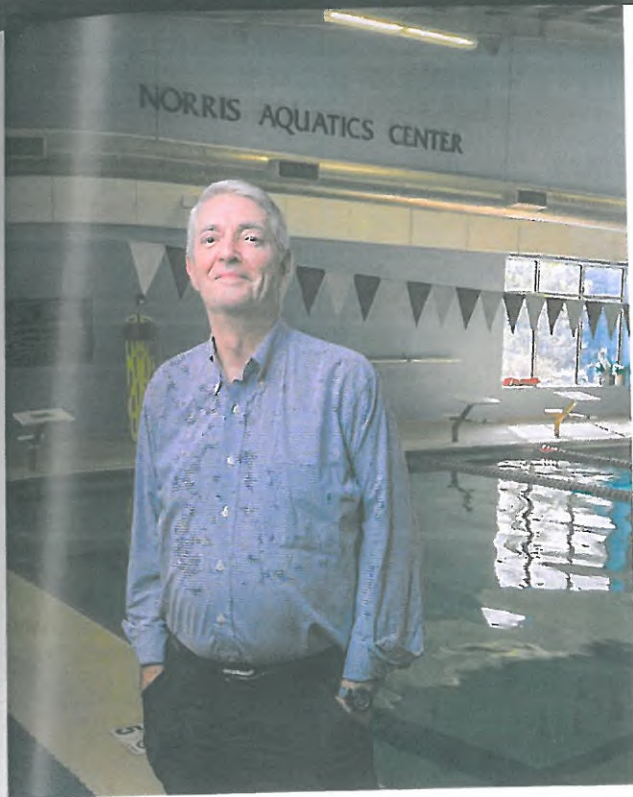
or Fairview Hospital or the Berkshire Museum, Tanglewood, Berkshire South, or any number of these organizations?”

Still, as much as non-profits help to enlighten us, improve us, and distinguish us from the lower species, their survival hinges upon the behavioral patterns of the hunter and the hunted. And there’s only so much game to go around.

“The challenge in the Berkshires is that we’re after the same, very small group of people and businesses,” says Julianne Boyd, artistic director for Barrington Stage in Pittsfield. Half of Barrington Stage’s \$3.3-million annual budget must be raised through contributions. “It’s very, very competitive,” Boyd adds.

“Donors have choices,” says Susan Wissler, executive director of The Mount, whose name, locally, has become synonymous with venerable organizations rescued from the abyss.

In 2008, The Mount was broke and its staff reduced to a skeleton crew. As Wissler describes it, “Men with double-breasted suits, shiny black shoes, and sunglasses” started visiting to take inventory, as per orders of the bank. The Mount—the former estate of Edith Wharton in Lenox—was closing. CNN picked up the story, followed by nearly every other major news outlet in America, and suddenly Edith Wharton fans from around the



country were sending in donations.

"I would never recommend financial crisis as a means of raising funds," Wissler hastens to add. Since then, she has guided The Mount toward stable financial footing and burnished its name as one of the region's leading cultural centers. "But it's always challenging," she says.

For the hunter who seeks funding, it takes a lot of homework and a lot of legwork. Some have been known to sleuth through public data, taking note of who gives what to which non-profit. In addition, there are the targeted mailings, dinner parties, cold calls, and "making new friends," as Norris calls it.

More than anything, raising funds requires mustering the nerve to ask for them. "It's hard to say no to someone you know and admire," says Polly MacPherson, director of special projects for the non-profit North Adams Regional Hospital.

By contrast, for the hunted whose funds are sought, it sometimes requires having to navigate through a fusillade of appeals and requests. Nancy Fitzpatrick, the county's matriarch of munificence, can speak to that.

"There have been weeks where I've gotten ten calls," says Fitzpatrick, owner of the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge and a generous supporter of organizations throughout the county. "No matter how deep your pockets, your resources are finite."

"It's not necessarily nice to feel like you're being assaulted," agrees Sally Eagle, a generous benefactor of local educational, cultural, environmental, and social-services organizations. But Eagle says such annoyances are rare and are far outweighed by the "fun and privilege" of directly impacting deserving organizations, feeling part of a community, and subsequently forming friendships with like-minded people.

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As it turns out, the hunted tend to be subsumed rather than consumed. That is to say, benefactors tend to get scooped up for positions on a non-profit's board of directors. Who best to court donors than a donor?

For organizations like Tanglewood and MASS MoCA, for example, Fitzpatrick has learned to get as much as she gives, in a manner of speaking. Norris, the namesake for Berkshire South's aquatic center, sits on several boards, including, as of this fall,

the board of directors of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation in Sheffield. "Most of us hate to ask for money. We really do," says Norris. "But you have to."

Indeed, Berkshire County depends on it. WAMC's fall fund drive was the 99th for Chartock. That's three a year, \$1 million each drive, many, many hours of lost sleep—a grind, physically and mentally. The fund drive concludes only after the \$1 million is raised and no sooner. "I'm always scared going into them," he admits.

It's now 8:15 a.m. on Saturday, six days into WAMC's fund drive, and \$630,000 has been raised. Weathered though it is, Chartock's steal-belted radio voice continues to find its traction among the region's grassroots listeners. Phones are ringing. Pallet loads of hand-crank radios and Pete Seeger CDs are being accounted for.

"It's all simple, folks. We're all in this together," he tells his listeners. "1-800-323-9262. Come on. 1-800-323-9262. We need you. Call now." Ready for a break, Chartock orders up a song from the Pete Seeger CD, then takes off his headset and leans back in his chair. "This is not marketing," he insists. "This is love."

"Love," he repeats, as his legion of faithful listeners, whose patience he tests three times a year, is treated to Pete Seeger singing "We Shall Overcome." ■