

A Family Foundation

**An Interview with Steven M. Hilton,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**

EDITORS' NOTE A graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Steven Hilton earned an M.B.A. from the UCLA Anderson School of Management. He worked for five years in hotel management with Hilton Hotels in Alabama, Georgia, and California, followed by a brief stint at an oyster farm in Hawaii, before joining the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in 1983. Hilton was named President in 1998, and in 2005, his responsibilities expanded to include CEO. He oversees the foundation's worldwide humanitarian work and serves on the board of the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters.



Steven M. Hilton

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Created in 1944 by international business pioneer Conrad N. Hilton, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (www.hiltonfoundation.org) provides funds to nonprofit organizations working to improve the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people throughout the world. In addition, the foundation annually awards the \$1.5 million Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize to a nonprofit organization doing extraordinary work. From its inception through 2010, the foundation has awarded nearly \$940 million in grants, distributing \$100 million last year. At approximately \$2.1 billion, it ranks among the nation's largest foundations in terms of assets.

What are the key areas of focus for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation?

As a family foundation created by my grandfather Conrad Hilton, our mission statement is his last will. That document directs the foundation to help relieve the suffering of the distressed and destitute, and also specifically mentions helping children and the Catholic sisters. We currently conduct strategic initiatives in five areas: providing safe water, ending chronic homelessness, preventing substance abuse, caring for vulnerable children, and extending Conrad Hilton's support for the work of Catholic Sisters.

For example, we've been involved with the Hilton/Perkins Program for more than 20 years. This is an international project helping children who are not only blind, but in many cases, have multiple disabilities. It's set up to build the capacity of local agencies so they

can do a better job enabling children to reach their potential. When we began, such programs were only in nine countries and now they're in 63. This program serves children who have great needs and typically don't receive enough attention and service.

Another priority area is clean water; something so basic to life that we take it for granted in the U.S. There are about 900 million people who don't have access to safe water and there are about 2.5 billion people that don't have basic sanitation. Lack of clean

water and sanitation causes an estimated five million deaths each year, which is staggering. Because the foundation understands that clean water and sanitation are critical to the health and well-being of people living in difficult situations, we have made this a priority for more than 20 years and have funded safe water projects for an estimated two million people around the world.

How does the foundation address homelessness?

It's an interesting tie in when you think of Conrad Hilton, the famous hotelier, because he put up people in hotels. Our approach to homelessness is to provide homes that both shelter and support people.

A brief quote from Conrad's last will is, "Love one another, for that is the whole law. So our fellow men deserve to be loved and encouraged, never to be abandoned, to wander alone in poverty and darkness."

Most of the homeless on the street are people who often have multiple issues such as alcohol or drug addiction, mental illness, or a medical problem, and they're probably among the most vulnerable populations in this country. Fortunately, there is a solution that works and that is supportive housing. The way this works is that you not only provide a place for somebody to live but also the services they need, which could be psychiatric care, medications, job training, or a support group. Supportive housing helps people get off the streets and get their lives back so they can enjoy a much better quality of life.

We started working on this problem in New York in 1991, but now concentrate primarily in Los Angeles, which has the largest homeless population in the U.S. and we target those homeless with the greatest needs.



Steven Hilton visits the family of Mathew Papango (center), a 10-year-old boy with multiple disabilities, in Manila, the Philippines.

You also developed the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize. How did that come about and what is the purpose of the prize?

We've been awarding the Hilton Prize for 15 years, and the driving force behind it was the idea of finding an extraordinary organization that is making a significant impact in alleviating human suffering and bringing more attention to what it is doing in the hope that it will encourage others to support its work. The prize can help draw attention to the particular humanitarian issue being addressed by the winning organization and assure people that they can feel confident their donations will be used well. There is a rigorous process of evaluation and a very distinguished international jury that makes the final selection.

Previously, we awarded the prize at our own conference each year, but we recently partnered with the Global Philanthropy Forum (GPF) in San Francisco. Our prize ceremony is now embedded within the GPF annual conference, because it brings together so many donors who are focused on international issues.

You grew up in a family that was known for giving back to the community. Did you always know you would be involved in this area?

No. Back in the early '80s, I had just returned from living out of state and wasn't sure what I wanted to do next. I went to see Don Hubbs (the foundation's president at the time) to see if he had any ideas. It happened to be when the foundation was adding staff in anticipation of receiving Conrad Hilton's estate and he suggested I might want to give foundation work a try. I started out at an entry level position and grew with the foundation, and I am now helping to bring the next generation into the philanthropic fold.

It has been a wonderful fit and I feel incredibly fortunate to carry on Conrad Hilton's legacy, as well as that of my father Barron Hilton, who has served on the foundation's board for more than 60 years. My father has not only provided the foundation with millions of dollars, but has also pledged most of his estate to the Hilton Foundation. So those monies will eventually come to the foundation, at which point our assets will more than double in size. ●