

About the Founder

His family called him “pockets”. As a young boy David Woodrow would gather interesting things - an acorn, colored string, or a steely marble, for example- and carry them around in his pockets. Interested in everything, he was the child who was asked when an odd tidbit was needed. Known for sharing what was in his pockets with anyone who asked, David also used his pocket treasures in innovative and artistic ways. This ability to see the extraordinary in all that is around us, curiosity, and generosity set a foundation for his business career. Other influences to his business philosophy, including his commitment to social justice, grew from his direct experience with prejudice.

One memory stands out in particular. As a boy scout, David’s father loaded up the local troop in a bus and headed out to the western shore of Lake Huron in Michigan for an overnight camping adventure in the woods. David shared a tent in the rain with the only African-American scout in the troop. Out in the back country of rural Michigan, someone noticed a black child with the group. In the night torches could be seen coming toward the scouts from the neighboring village, clearly threatening the group of boys. David remembers his father scrambling to get everyone back on the bus, and to the safety of their suburban Detroit community. While he still reminisces about this incident with his black scouting friend, now a civil rights attorney, clearly the injustice of that night factored in to David’s commitment to minorities, people in need, and social justice issues.

Early career opportunities provided the experience and insights that later have shaped the CommunityLink Foundation. Exploring his talent, David started his career in the fine arts by launching a successful gallery in Charlevoix, Michigan, “Harmony of Arts”. While attuned to the creativity of the arts, he also gained valuable retail business experience at a youthful age.

David moved on to teaching in Charlevoix, with a potpourri of courses that included art, biology, and coaching track. The experience in schools and direct responsibility for the development of children offered insights in to the needs of students and families. If they are to succeed, David saw firsthand the requirements for nurturing, support, and opportunity.

As newlyweds, David and his wife moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan and the University of Michigan. They chose to live at Pierce Tourist Home in Ann Arbor, which paid their living expenses for the work they provided. David worked in the local hotel industry. During that two and half year period, they saved their money and when the time came invested it in their first hotel.

Always an entrepreneur, David actively acquired, managed, and grew a variety of properties. These eventually included 35 independent hotels, restaurants, and a conference center across the Detroit metropolitan area. After 15 years, the properties were sold and David turned his creativity, enthusiasm and entrepreneurial energy to his

passions of social justice, sharing, and applying business skills to solving complex community issues.

While growing his businesses, David also raised a family of four children-successful adults in their own right. One is an artist, following one of David's passions. Another is a journalist, following in David's mother's footsteps. The third is an engineer, and the youngest is now a social networking professional for a major auto company.

Serving as a community volunteer, two experiences informed David's creation of the CommunityLink Foundation and the subsequent personal funding for its development and launch. The first was in securing stable financial support for services to battered women and children. The second was in raising money for children in less affluent homes to be able to attend a highly regarded private school for the talented and gifted in Ann Arbor, *Emerson School*.

In his hotels, David always kept 6 rooms open for use as emergency shelters for women and children on the run from abusers. His hotels offered anonymity and an immediate warm, safe place to spend the night while social service providers organized to help. One evening an abuser located a woman and her infant child. He went to the room and grabbed the child. As the man held the baby over a railing and threatened to drop the child, David realized there had to be a better way to protect women and children. He was able to talk the man out of hurting the child, and then immediately went to work to develop a community system that would offer adequate services.

He invested \$100,000 to organize a ballot initiative to fund the building of a state of the art women's shelter. The initiative was passed and \$3.5 million tax dollars were raised, the shelter was built, and it still remains as a key asset in helping children and families. David applied what he had learned as a biology teacher - the importance of providing a nurturing ecosystem. He applied his business experience in a social setting, and found the pragmatism, innovation, and energy required in business could be constructively applied to complex social problems.

The second experience, at Emerson School, resulted in the creation of the mechanics that are at the heart of the CommunityLink Foundation. As parents, David and his wife were actively involved in their children's school – Emerson. Concerned about talented and gifted children from homes that could not afford the private school tuition, they joined with other parents to raise money for scholarships by sponsoring an art auction.

When people who purchased art used a credit card for payment, Emerson lost revenue to large banking fees. Using Emerson and the Ann Arbor community as a model, David created the CommunityLink Foundation model and successfully engaged local businesses and banks in siphoning off a portion of the bank fees to support tuition scholarships. The system worked perfectly! Then new staff leadership came to the school, and the decision was made to use the proceeds from the art sale to fund general expenses. David negotiated ownership of the CommunityLink Foundation idea, patented the process, and then invested in the creation of the foundation.

CommunityLink Foundation continues to be David's passion, and he has committed substantial time and financial resources in to its development. Over time, the model has grown in sophistication and focus. Public understanding both of the banking system, and increased comfort with using technology for commerce has caught up with the vision for the foundation. Nonprofit thought leaders increasingly are experimenting with business-based solutions to intractable social problems, solutions such as the CommunityLink Foundation.

At the heart of CommunityLink Foundation is a belief in the power of consumer purchasing used within a defined community for the benefit of that community. Borrowing ideas from the nonprofit sector, social justice movements, banking and commerce, CLF is a novel innovation that can provide the "life blood" of services – ongoing, unrestricted, cash flow. In several of the CLF sites, the funds generated are focused on providing services that "wrap around" K-12 school districts. These are services such as counseling, food support, recreational activities, tutoring, basic medical services, and schools supplies required to deliver on the American promise – that each child has the same starting place in life, without regard to their parent's situation. Several of these sites also are creating permanent endowments to fund higher education for each child in the community who desires to succeed.

As a child affectionately nicknamed "pockets", David Woodrow has collected ideas, examples, strategies that have worked, from a number of fields to shape a new initiative. As an artist he has viewed the world with a new eye, willing to solve problems in creative ways. As a biologist, he has built in to the CommunityLink Foundation theories of community ecology, and the interaction of community systems toward health rather than dysfunction. As a teacher, he knows the needs of schools, of teachers, and especially of children. His early experience with injustice heightens this awareness related to children of color, or from other marginalized families.

Together these experiences made David a successful businessman. That success has empowered him to use this business skills in creating a new marketplace in communities – good for business, good for communities, good for schools, and especially, good for children.