

# ASPEN PHILANTHROPIST

INSPIRED GIVING

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## PLAYING NICE

*As competition grows, the arts buck the trends and build audience.*



Gregg Anderson,  
pastor of the  
Aspen Chapel,  
which houses  
both cultural and  
human-service  
programs.

bigger city, it would have to be the other way around.”

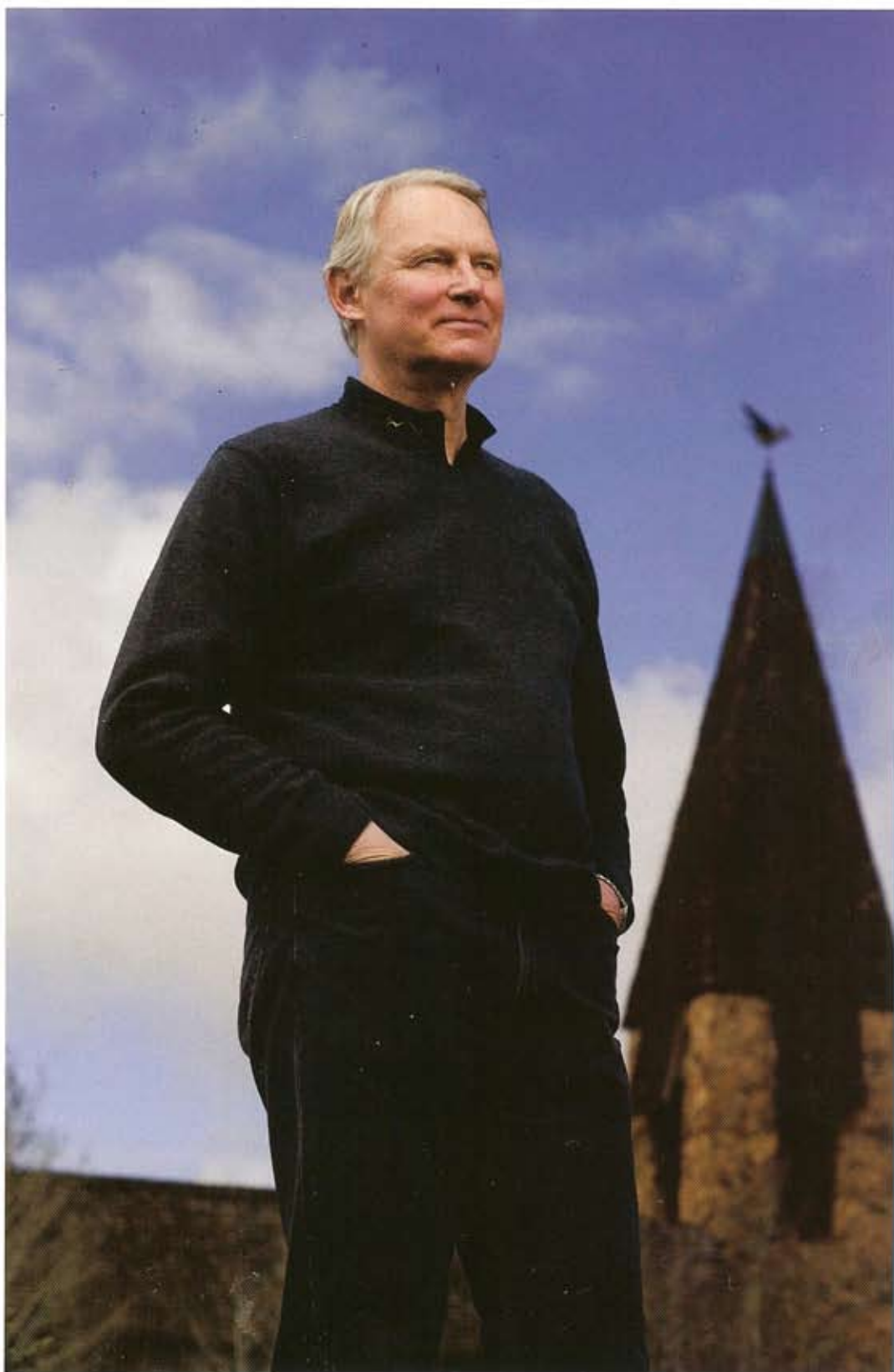
Without a major university, without a discretionary metropolitan population looking for a cultural event to attend after work, Aspen’s non-profit programs face the challenge of having to draw a destination audience with compelling international marketing campaigns and the lure of some of the world’s pre-eminent artists, scientists and thinkers. And in today’s climate, with corporations and grant makers eager to give to socially responsible causes, the Aspen name itself, prestigious as it is, can be a deterrent to attracting philanthropic aid.

“We rely heavily on individual donors because a lot of grant makers see the name Aspen in the title and say, ‘Yeah, right. Why do I need to donate to an Aspen organization?’” Consiglio says.

#### THAT’S THE SPIRIT

For Gregg Anderson, pastor of the Aspen Chapel, the challenge has been to broaden his focus, not only to various forms of faith and spirituality, but to the entire spectrum of human needs in today’s world. One of the few non-profits to encompass both the arts and human services, the chapel supports an art gallery; an after-school program that teaches a balanced spectrum of spirituality, human values and ethics; a Samaritan program to help individuals in financial crisis, and a number of other local and national charitable programs.

As a faith-based organization, the Aspen Chapel finds itself in an unusual position in its community. While, as Anderson says, faith and charity are inseparable, and traditionally religious organizations top all lists of charitable-dollar recipients, the Aspen





Walter Isaacson,  
president and  
CEO, Aspen  
Institute.

community defies the statistics.

"If there is \$400 million given to non-profits annually in this valley, my guess would be that \$4-6 million is given annually to all religious organizations," Anderson says. "This would not include capital campaigns, which religious organizations typically complete successfully," he notes.

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"The Roaring Fork Valley has fewer people proportionally associated with religious organizations than just about any other place in the country. At the same time, the vast majority of people in Aspen would consider themselves spiritual in their own way. Perhaps one could say that religious organizations are financially challenged, but charitable giving here is way above average and could very well be motivated by the individual's personal and spiritual

perspectives. This could be a dynamic unique to the Roaring Fork Valley."

Anderson says that at one time, contrary to the national norm, he did feel that it was significantly more difficult to raise money for human services and spiritual needs in Aspen than it was for some of the more glamorous non-profits like the Aspen Music Festival and the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. However, he says, he has seen a gradual change in attitude over the past decade.

"When I first arrived here, social discussion of religion or spirituality seemed to be practically banned," Anderson observes. "Today, I cannot attend a social gathering anywhere in Aspen without someone initiating a spiritual conversation or related question. For this, I am deeply grateful."

With no formal membership, existing in a community that tends not to affiliate itself with a particular religious body, the Aspen Chapel has managed through its creative thinking and diversity of programs to realize a small but steady budget increase year after year.

"Because of the open, inclusive and communal purpose of the Aspen Chapel, we have connected and provided some form of service to the vast majority of Aspenites

over the past 38 years," Anderson says, adding that he has also seen a significant change in the local attitude toward human-service groups.

When he first arrived in 1978, he says, there was one Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in town meeting once a week with half a dozen people in attendance. "Today, there is an entire column of weekly social and self-help groups advertised in *The Aspen Times*," he says. "Hundreds of people are meeting regularly in Aspen to care about and support one another in various ways."

#### UNITED WE STAND

Whether or not Aspen's non-profit community is an exception to the rules of international philanthropy, there is no question that its marketing directors and creative minds are well aware of those trends and working hard to ensure that their organizations remain both strong and united. The arts have been a crucial part of Aspen's international presence; the fact that they have adapted so well and continue to remain viable in today's desperate global climate is a testament to the community's vision and initiative.

"The challenges facing those of us in the art world during these troubled times is nothing new," says David McClendon, artistic director of Theatre Aspen. "The paradox seems to be that it is in such times as these that the arts take on new meaning. We must always remember what our functions and responsibilities are to our community. The theater in particular has the ability to allow us to take a look at ourselves: who we are, who we were, and just who we might become." ■