



Change is good

Former GE executive helping to educate Central American children

By Stephen P. Schmidt, MS '11 ● Photo by Stan Godlewski

The reaction was simple, but poignant: “Wow.” That was the overall sentiment when Kate Curran '94 told her co-workers in 2007 that she was stepping down from her post as vice president for external affairs at General Electric Money-Americas in Stamford, Conn.

“People were shocked,” Curran said. “People don’t resign from these jobs very easily.” And if they do, they usually have a plan for the next phase of their careers.

Curran went on to found The Giving Project, a nonprofit organization based in Bridgeport. Its mission is to bring “the gift of quality education to the children of the developing world” by building schools, driving the supply of learning materials, training teachers and engaging parents. But three years ago, all she knew was that her life needed a new direction.

She and her five siblings were coping with the loss of a brother and their two parents, Hugh and Eleanor, within two years’ time from 2005–06. Their father had been a World War II fighter pilot before serving as mayor of Bridgeport in the '60s and later, a state Superior Court judge. Their mother was a “remarkably generous person,” in Kate’s words.

“They led amazing lives,” Curran said. “I saw a recipe of family, public service, accomplishment and generosity.”

While at GE, the Milford, Conn., resident designed the company’s first large Community Reinvestment Act program, overseeing more than \$100 million in community development grants and investments, a large portion of which went into revitalization projects for her native Bridgeport. But she wanted to do more to carry on her family’s humanitarian legacy. After all, she earned her law degree from Quinnipiac, summa cum laude, with the intent of starting a nonprofit organization that focused on juvenile rights.

She spent most of 2008 traveling the world, visiting and learning the cultures of places such as Argentina, Spain and Tanzania.

Kate Curran '94 founded The Giving Project.

“Traveling to places like Argentina and Africa, you very quickly move to a place of gratitude, seeing how fortunate you really have been, in part by virtue of where you were born,” Curran said.

Through the help of a career coach, she realized her next calling: to found The Giving Project in September 2009. The organization has raised money to build seven schools for about 1,000 students in Guatemala. The new schools, in some cases, are replacing “dark, cold, wet dirt shacks.” In addition, the organization has funded a water recycling system for an orphanage in Honduras. Curran visits the sites about every two months to make sure all operations are running smoothly.

After she decided to concentrate on Central America first, Curran called an executive of a major bank in the region, BAC-Credomatic, which at the time was a joint venture with GE. The executive agreed to pay 50 percent of the costs for the first

project in each Central American country. That would be just the start of her GE connections financially aiding her cause. In fact, a significant percentage of The Giving Project’s funding has come through former co-workers, whose donations are then matched by the company’s GE Foundation.

“Part of what motivates me is creating really meaningful philanthropic experiences for others so they can share in the benefits of being generous,” Curran said.

Curran hopes to hire staff members by the end of the year. Currently, she relies on a team of five interns, two of whom are

Quinnipiac students: Collean Toupin '14, a public relations major and Danielle Hunter '11, an interactive digital design major.

“She’s motivated,” Toupin said of her boss. “She gets things done. When she puts her mind to something, the ball gets rolling and she makes things happen.”

Curran said the needs of the children she helps are daunting. “But I am inspired when I connect with them. A little girl named Michaela followed me around at one school inauguration. I had a note from her a few weeks later saying, ‘I like my new school because it is clean and there is no garbage, but I would like some books now please.’ I can’t wait to see her with books in her hands.”

THE CURRAN FILE

- Education – BA in English, College of the Holy Cross; JD '94, Quinnipiac School of Law.
- Career – Founder, The Giving Project; former vice president for external affairs, General Electric Money-Americas, Stamford, Conn.