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OPINION

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Monday Forum

PHILANTHROPY

Gates Foundation could learn from Florida

By JO ANNE CHESTER BANDER

By merging two of their charities and adding substantial assets, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, formed the wealthiest charitable foundation in the world.

Worth \$17 billion, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation must distribute some \$850 million each and every year to qualifying charities — almost \$3.5 million a working day — according to the current IRS pay-out requirement of 5 percent.

The foundation now leads the list of the over 44,000 foundations in the United States. According to 1997 data from the Foundation Center, Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe counties are home to 933 foundations, with \$4.5 billion in assets — about one-quarter of the philanthropic potential of the Gates Foundation.

Much smaller in individual size and collective wealth, many

of those local foundations still have important lessons to teach Bill and Melinda Gates, because having money is only the first step. The second big step is to use those charitable assets to create value for society. These are some of the lessons our local foundations have to share.

■ Be passionate about a cause, become expert about it and become its advocate.

That is what The A.L. Mailman Family Foundation has done. Local trustees Marilyn "Mickey" Mailman Segal and Wendy Masi are experts on early childhood development, their passion, and have used their knowledge to leverage some \$1 million in annual grants their foundation makes throughout the United States.

The foundation has a mission to strengthen families and enhance their ability to support the development and well-being of their children.

■ While grants allow

nonprofits to provide critical services, an organization must also be financially strong and well-managed for long-term effectiveness.

Fort Lauderdale's A.D. Henderson Foundation often makes grants for technical assistance or capacity building, such as funds to design a management information system or fundraising plan. To assure that South Florida had permanent capacity to help nonprofits, it was one of the early local supporters of the Community Foundation of Broward's Nonprofit Resource Center.

■ Create partnerships that leverage human energy and compassion. That is what the Festus Stacy Foundation does in its work in the areas of Christian services, missions work, human services and education. A grant to Project Teamwork is helping to build a church-based collaborative to expand the

number of local foster care homes.

■ Invest in individuals who are change agents. Through its Dwight Allison Fellows Program, the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties makes unsolicited grants to grassroots leaders who are serving their communities in extraordinary ways. They do this for a simple reason: to celebrate and provide as models for others the builders of community, the social entrepreneurs, who often go unrecognized but who make vital contributions to our way of life.

■ Have a vision and make it a reality. In its work through the Sustainable Everglades Initiative and current work around Smart Growth, the Palm Beach-based office of Chicago's John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is combining grant dollars and leadership to build

collaboration around an issue that impacts all residents of our region.

Bill and Melinda Gates have the opportunity and challenge to make a real difference in the areas of education and children's health.

It would be wonderful if philanthropy's watchdogs and critics could soon point to the impact of the Gates Foundation on some of our society's most intractable problems.

That is the unique opportunity foundations have, to be the risk takers and venture capitalists of the social change movement.

The author is executive director of The Donors Forum, an association of over 90 foundations and corporate giving programs active in South Florida with a mission to promote effective philanthropy in the region.