



PHILANTHROPY

The Real Thing

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CAN DESCRIBE, BUT NEVER REPLACE, AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

For the better part of the last three years, I have had the privilege of writing this Indian River Insights column in *Vero Beach Magazine*. That's 36 columns, give or take, written on the topic of philanthropy and charitable giving in our Indian River County community. I submit each by a monthly deadline.

This one was due January 1.

Deadlines have a funny way of getting me to pay attention. While there are some months when the specific subject of the column is one that inspires me to start writing well in advance of my deadline, this is one where the words just wouldn't come. At least not for this writer.

Over the course of the last year, like many people, I read articles and listened to news stories about the rise of artificial intelligence. One aspect of this new technology that piques my curiosity is its ability to compose written content, including articles, social media posts, essays, and other creative material that simulates



Childcare Resources relies on making connections in the community through fostering empathy with residents who want to help local children.

the work of an actual human being. ChatGPT is one application that has been getting a significant amount of attention lately. Could it be the answer to my writer's block? I was about to find out.

ChatGPT, which stands for "Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer," is an artificial intelligence chatbot developed by the company OpenAI. Once this application is downloaded onto a computer, tablet, or smartphone, it works by attempting to understand a text input, otherwise known as a prompt, and generating a dynamic response. It can do this because the algorithm can search and curate

virtually any content that exists on the internet and present it in a usable format.

As an example, when ChatGPT is given the prompt "What is the best recipe for bread pudding?" it responds, "A classic bread pudding is a delightful treat that brings comfort and warmth." This statement is followed by a list of ingredients and cooking instructions.

While ChatGPT's result is both accurate and thorough, and its speed is impressive, there is still something not quite right about this artificially intelligent dessert, at least for my taste, because the recipe calls for two ingredients that

no self-respecting amateur chef living in the South would include: raisins and chopped nuts. Just ask any of the countless neighbors, friends, or family members who have ended a dinner party at my home with a warm serving of my "Pick's New Orleans-style Bread Pudding." No raisins, no nuts. Just bread, milk, sugar, cinnamon, eggs, a pinch of salt, and caramel sauce.

Sure, a bread pudding minus raisins or nuts could be considered a personal preference. In my opinion, however, it is my personal preferences that make my bread pudding authentic.

Personal preference also has



Use of ChatGPT in some circumstances can be helpful, but it's not human.

quite a bit to do with the charities that people choose to support as volunteers or donors. It is a person's authentic engagement or investment that makes these acts of kindness and generosity special.

Ask ChatGPT, however, to describe why charitable giving is important, and while the answer is both thorough and succinct, something inspiring is certainly missing. Take the following answer, for example:

Charitable giving, at its core, is a powerful force for positive change that extends far beyond the act of donating money or resources. It is a conduit for fostering empathy, creating connections, and analyzing tangible improvements in society.

Okay, ChatGPT. I'll play along.

So, how does charitable giving foster empathy?

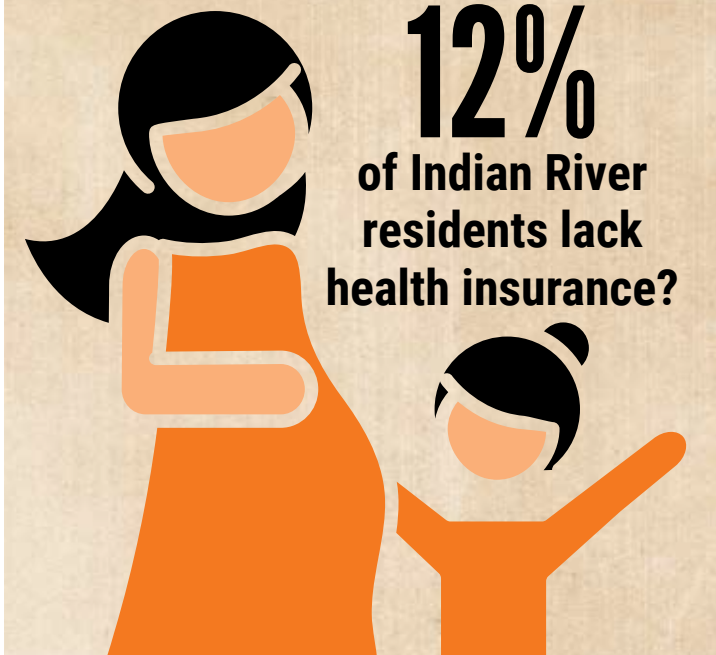
Firstly, charitable giving has an intrinsic emotional benefit. It cultivates a sense of purpose and fulfillment in individuals by allowing them to contribute to causes larger than themselves. The act of giving, whether through donations, volunteering, or fundraising,

can bring about a profound sense of joy and satisfaction, enhancing one's overall well-being.

I recently helped clients donate to Childcare Resources, a local charity that provides high-quality early education to children from low-income families. Previously, these clients had donated primarily to similar causes affiliated with their church. When they learned about the impact this local charity makes in the lives of some of the more vulnerable members of our community beyond their congregation's membership, including homeless children, they were inspired to learn and eventually do more.

They were familiar with much of the data that speaks to the importance of quality early childhood education, but it was the individual stories of the children served by the organization that touched them at a deeper level and motivated them to give. This act of charitable giving was special not because of the transactional nature of a donation but because of the

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KELLY ROGERS

human connection between my clients and the children they will help.

So, what does ChatGPT have to say about the connections created through charitable giving?

The impact of charitable giving transcends mere monetary value. It stimulates a ripple effect, inspiring others to contribute and creating a culture of generosity. Through the power of example, it encourages compassion and kindness, fostering a more empathetic society.

Walk through any of our community's anchor institutions where philanthropy plays an important role in the organization's history and ongoing operations. Donor recognition walls

Inside the front entrance of the Vero Beach Museum of Art, one of the first things you'll see is the donor wall.

I see authentic connections between donors that artificial intelligence knows nothing about.

list the names of benefactors whose generosity helped get important things done, such as building a stage at Riverside Theatre, growing a permanent collection for the Vero Beach Museum of Art, or equipping an operating room at Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital with 21st-century medical devices.

Taking a closer look at these lists of names, I see authentic connections between donors that artificial intelligence knows nothing about. One of dozens that come to mind is the special relationship between two clients of mine who met and fell in love after the deaths of their respective spouses. For years, their names were listed within the same grouping of top donors to the Vero Beach Museum of Art, but their introduction came when a mutual friend

hosted the widow and widower at a reception in advance of an exhibit opening. The word they both use to describe their connection means "destiny" in Yiddish. When I see the mutual respect these two have for each other's pasts, combined with the loving way they spend time together as each other's "bashert," there is nothing artificial about it.

What are the tangible improvements that ChatGPT suggests are made possible by charitable giving?

Charitable giving plays a pivotal role in addressing societal challenges. Charitable donations fuel organizations and initiatives that tackle pressing issues such as poverty, education, healthcare, environmental conservation, and more. By supporting these causes, individuals become active participants in shaping



Connections between people cannot be replaced with artificial intelligence.

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Donors give because they believe in a cause, such as their place of worship or alma mater, or a health care charity.

a better world, effecting positive change in communities locally, nationally, and globally.

In the fall of 2014, I brought my wife and youngest son from Bakersfield, California to Vero Beach for my second in-person interview for the role of CEO of Indian River Community Foundation. On one of our strolls down Ocean Drive, we spied the playground at Humiston Park and walked over to look. After a quick glance at a rickety teeter-totter and a rusty set of monkey bars wrapped in yellow “caution” tape, we opted to skip the potential trip to the emergency room and

continued toward the beach to watch the waves.

One year later, a ribbon cutting was held to unveil the new playground at Humiston Park. The public-private project was made possible with donations collected by a group of mothers organized as Go Play Vero and construction by the City of Vero Beach Parks and Recreation department. Parents, grandparents, and other concerned citizens who rallied to make this playground possible are recognized on engraved bricks, and a monument lists the names of the project’s top donors. I am proud to see Community Foundation listed



Above: Former City of Vero Beach recreation director Rob Slezak, founder of Go Play Vero Kelley Della Porta, and City of Vero Beach assistant recreation director Patty Howard were instrumental in getting a new Humiston Park playground (below) installed.



SAM WOLFE

INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS



there and continue to point this out as a tangible improvement made possible by charitable gifts, big and small, that have made our community better.

Sure, ChatGPT, there are

other practical benefits that come with charitable giving, such as tax deductions. In my experience, this typically affects what donors give—such as appreciated stock, or when donations are made—

often bundled as one large gift to a donor-advised fund that pays out to multiple charities over several years. However, a tax deduction is rarely the reason why someone chooses to make a donation.

Donors give because they believe in a cause, such as their place of worship. They give to show their appreciation, as when they donate to an alma mater. Grateful patients often give to a hospital or other health-related charity for the care

they received or to help others in need to receive the same. Founders and other dedicated volunteers give to a wide range of organizations to help animals, promote the arts, support education, preserve the environment, or give vulnerable individuals and families needed relief. These acts of generosity tap into a wide range of emotions because of the difference they make.

“Tears of joyiness” is the phrase my daughter uses for the contagious laughter that sometimes ensues when she is moved by a stranger’s act of kindness or generosity. There is nothing artificial about that. ✨

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