

WellesleyWeston

MAGAZINE



FIVE DOLLARS

winter
2024/2025



volunteering
community service
helping out
doing our part

good works

contributions
neighbor to neighbor
philanthropy

Democratizing Philanthropy

ELIZABETH SUNEBY **writer**



COURTESY OF CUMMINGS FOUNDATION

after several successful decades building and leasing commercial real estate in Greater Boston, Bill Cummings switched his primary focus from making money to giving it away, alongside his wife, Joyce.

In 1986, Bill and Joyce established Cummings Foundation, which has grown to be one of the three largest private foundations in New England. While the Cummings originally pledged 10 percent of their income annually to charitable causes, they no longer draw any income, and they have donated more than 90 percent of their assets.

“We realized early on that there is a point at which it doesn’t make a difference to earn more money. Rather, we were much more interested in helping the community.”

– Bill Cummings, Founder, Cummings Properties and Foundation

*Cummings Foundation co-founders
Joyce and Bill Cummings*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CUMMINGS FOUNDATION

Over the past 38 years, the Cummings have donated most of their commercial buildings to Cummings Foundation. One hundred percent of profits from the company’s office, lab, medical, healthcare, and retail space rental income fund the Foundation. What’s more, Cummings Properties manages the buildings at no cost to the Foundation.

“Rather than sell off parts of his business to fund philanthropy, Bill wanted to support all the employees who have helped make the company successful. So, the vast majority of the buildings that are managed by Cummings Properties are owned by the Foundation.”

– Joyce Vyriotes, Cummings Foundation Executive Director

In 2011, Joyce and Bill Cummings joined the Giving Pledge, a charitable campaign created by Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, and Melinda French

above: Two Cummings properties are located at TradeCenter 128, Woburn (left) and 144 North Road, Sudbury (right); bottom: Seated (L-R) Cummings Foundation executive director Joyce Vyriotes and director emeritus Joel Swets; standing (L-R) deputy director Andrew Bishop, and Foundation counsel Kris Wilson

Gates to encourage the world’s wealthiest individuals and families to give away at least half their wealth to charitable causes. With the Giving Pledge’s mission to promote philanthropy and share strategies for making a positive impact, the Cummings’ decision to join was easy. The decision to reveal publicly their billion-dollar wealth was not. The Cummings lead a low-key lifestyle.

“Our neighbors in Winchester and our friends pretty much knew that we were comfortable financially, but until The Boston Globe published

an article about our philanthropic activities on the front page of the paper in the summer of 2023, none had guessed that our assets or those of the Foundation had grown enough to put us in this particular company.”

– Bill Cummings

With 11 million square feet of debt-free space in 11 communities north of Boston and \$3.5 billion in assets, Cummings Foundation has awarded more than \$500 million to nonprofits since its inception. The Foundation’s first philanthropic initiatives included funding two



COURTESY OF CUMMINGS FOUNDATION

“making a positive impact” **good works**

high-quality senior living communities: New Horizons at Marlboro and New Horizons at Choate, Woburn. Novel in many regards, these debt-free nonprofit retirement communities never increase residents’ rent or meal charges.

“Simply put, Cummings buildings power local charities. Rent dollars go back into the community to help local nonprofits and the people they serve.”

– Andrew Bishop, Cummings Foundation Deputy Director

Over the years, the Foundation has also forged special relationships with several academic institutions—the majority due to the Cummings’ longstanding personal relationships with the institutions’ leaders. With a commitment to educational equity and workforce development, they made their first multi-million dollar donation to a university in 2005,

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above: Cummings Foundation deputy director Andrew Bishop (left) with co-founder Joyce Cummings (right)

which resulted in the renaming of the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University (Bill’s alma mater), and subsequently to the University of Global Health Equity in Rwanda, Franklin Cummings Tech (formerly called Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology), the



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good works “pressing needs exist in the communities”

Cummings School of Nursing and Health Sciences at Endicott College, the James McKeown School of Education at Salem State University, the Cummings School of Architecture at Roger Williams University, and to the Paul Farmer Collaborative of Harvard Medical School and University of Global Health Equity.

However, the flagship initiative of the Foundation is the Cummings \$30 Million Grant Program, which supports several hundred much smaller nonprofits in locations with Cummings properties are and where its employees live. Historically, donations have gone to organizations based in and serving residents of Suffolk, Middlesex, and Essex counties. Recently, the Foundation expanded its reach to include the cities/towns of Brookline, Dedham, Milton, Needham, Quincy, and Wellesley in Norfolk County. While the geographical focus is local, the causes the Foundation supports are relatively broad: human services, food insecurity, health care, education, and social justice. In 2024, the Foundation also branched out to include environmental nonprofits.

Each May, Cummings Foundation awards 150 local nonprofits multi-year grants: 125 receive \$30,000 to \$300,000 typically paid over

three years, and 25 receive \$300,000 to \$1 million typically paid over 10 years. The Foundation invites about 175 local volunteers to make most of its funding decisions through a model called “democratized philanthropy.”

“Joyce and Bill believe the funding will have a much greater impact if we involve the community. That’s why we leave it up to local nonprofits and volunteers to guide our grant allocations. Through applications submitted by nonprofits, we learn what pressing needs exist in the communities. And through a comprehensive vetting process led by local professionals—including reviewing letters of interest and grant applications, coaching smaller organizations through the process, overseeing budgets, and conducting site visits—we identify the most promising nonprofits to fund and strengthen relationships with them.”

– Joyce Vyriotes

below: Cummings Foundation co-founders Joyce and Bill Cummings with executive director Joyce Vyriotes congratulating grantees during a Grant Winner Celebration event



COURTESY OF CUMMINGS FOUNDATION



Currently, Susan leads one of the Foundation’s five geographically based site visit committees of about 15 volunteers, including Ilissa Povich and Lynne and Gary Smith, all of Wellesley. The team meets with funded nonprofits to better understand the challenges and needs the organizations face so the Foundation can better support them moving forward. The volunteers feel honored to be given the chance to participate in meaningful decision-making and to meet people who work tirelessly to make this world a better place.

With a lean staff, the Foundation relies on the deep expertise and rich diversity of Boston’s professional community. Susan Solomont of Weston, a philanthropy consultant, has been a Cummings Foundation volunteer since 2017. Given her extensive experience in both corporate and private philanthropy, she underscores that ceding power and empowering volunteers is a bold approach for a billionaire to adopt.

“Cummings Foundation operates unlike any other I know, and I’ve worked with many over the years. I’ve seen first-hand how democratizing philanthropy is an effective strategy.”

– Susan Solomont, Senior Advisor, The Philanthropic Initiative

“With every site visit, we go in curious and open-minded to learn and we come out inspired by selfless people making a difference.”

– Ilissa Povich

“The reports we draft after each site visit help guide future grant-making priorities.”

– Gary Smith

Roxbury Weston Programs is one of the 150 local nonprofits Cummings Foundation supports. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement and founded in 1965, Roxbury Weston Programs operates the longest run-

top: Foundation volunteer Susan Solomont (standing, third from right) joins team members from Artists for Humanity to celebrate new funding from Cummings; bottom: Cummings Properties president Eric Anderson (left) with Roxbury Weston Programs board member (and alumnus) Henry Kasdon (right) during a Grant Winner Celebration event



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CUMMINGS FOUNDATION

“make this world a better place” **good works**

Nonprofits based in Wellesley and Weston that have been supported by Cummings Foundation

Wellesley

- Amplify Latinx
- Babson College, ACTIVATE entrepreneurial curriculum for Roxbury youth
- Cure Alzheimer’s Fund
- Freshman Fresh Start
- Massachusetts Bay Community College Foundation

Weston

- Regis College, Carol A. Donovan Endowed Dean of Nursing and healthcare clinic
- Roxbury Weston Programs
- The Massachusetts Alliance for Early College



MICHAEL QUIET PHOTOGRAPHY

above: (l to r) Amaka Ubaka, Joyce Cummings, Regis College president Antoinette Hays, and Bill Cummings during 2023 commencement exercises in Weston

ning, intentionally diverse preschool program in the country, nurturing the next generation of socially aware and conscious thinkers. Located in Weston, the preschool celebrates friendship and caring among children and families from diverse backgrounds and communities. Roxbury Weston provides private free transportation to its Boston families, which costs the school about \$75,000 a year.

“Welcoming children from Boston is an integral part of our mission. Currently, we are in the second year of our second four-year grant from

An advertisement for Felicia Maria Interiors. It features a woman with long brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, sitting on a light-colored armchair. The background is a plain, light grey wall. The text "FM INTERIORS" is at the top left. Below it, a list of services: "TRANSITIONAL DESIGN", "MODERN FLAIR", "RENDERINGS", "E-DESIGN", and "FURNISHINGS". At the bottom, the text "boston & beyond" is written in a cursive font, followed by "feliciamariadesigns.com" and "@feliciamaria.interiors".

An advertisement for "Fierce Everywhere!". The background is a solid bright pink. The text "Be FIERCE Everywhere!" is written in large, bold, white and black letters. Below this, a white box with a pink border contains the text: "45-minute workouts that include HIIT, resistance training, metabolic conditioning, flexibility & mobility!". Underneath, there are three lines of motivational text: "Be EMPOWERED. Be CHALLENGED.", "Be INSPIRED. Be STRONG.", and "Be FIERCE. Be YOU.". At the bottom, it says "Virtual classes | Zoom & FB Live | 832-221-4966" and "www.fiercebychoice.com | coachd@fiercebychoice.com".

“nurturing the next generation” good works



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Cummings, which helps us fund transportation and meet escalating operating expenses. We are thankful that Cummings took the time to understand our mission and believes in the importance of our school. We are humbled and grateful to be included in the diverse group of non-profits Cummings supports.”

– Robin Levin, Director, Roxbury Weston Preschool
(www.roxwes.org)

Amplif’s LatinX, based in Wellesley, is another Cummings Foundation grantee. Through initiatives that showcase Latinx leadership, galvanize legislative and public support, and champion economic mobility, the

nonprofit works to advance Latinos and their businesses across the state. Business programming is central to Amplify LatinX’s mission, with a new



TO LEARN MORE about Bill Cummings’ business and charitable journey, read *Starting Small and Making It Big: A Lifetime of Lessons in Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy* (Bill Cummings, 2018).

above: Preschoolers at Roxbury Weston Programs celebrate the organizations Cummings grant

focus on supporting clean energy-related businesses and on facilitating connections to procurement opportunities in the government and private sectors.

“We are grateful to Cummings for supporting our ALX Business Program. We can offer more Latino business owners in Massachusetts not only online group workshops but also personalized coaching and strategic guidance. To strengthen Latino businesses and their communities, we serve a wide range of entrepreneurs, from a Peruvian Japanese restaurateur in Lawrence to an esthetician in Sherborn. Latinos are the largest and fastest-growing community of color in Massachusetts; therefore, Latino prosperity is Massachusetts prosperity.”

– Eneida Román, Co-founder, President and CEO, Amplify LatinX
(www.amplifylatinx.com)

Cummings Foundation awards grants to a widely diverse group of non-profits each year. To determine if your organization could qualify, visit cummingsfoundation.org. 