

Seeds of Change

Fixing the world, one dollar at a time. BY LEAH DOBKIN

For Jane Beyer, it started during a vacation to Mexico in 2006. "I was touched by the poverty, and decided then and there that I needed to do something more for the Mexican people and in particular the women and children," says the Marshall & Ilsley Corp. executive. After returning home, she heard about Dining for Women, a giving circle of women who hold monthly potlucks to raise money for Third World women and children. She decided to create a local chapter, which will hold its first meeting in early 2008.

In just the past six years, giving circles have gone from being under the radar to a significant philanthropic force. Last year, the Regional Associations of Grantmakers reported that giving circles – groups of people who pool their charitable donations and typically decide together how to donate the money – have collectively raised more than \$100 million nationwide. Locally, there are at least five official giving circles, including Dining for Women, Womenade, The Giving Circle of Milwaukee, Eddie's Book Club and Everyday Philanthropists.

Eric Lind, 37, created Everyday Philanthropists in 2002 after graduating from Future Milwaukee, a community leadership development program. He wanted to give back, yet donating to

local charities individually didn't seem like enough and participating on a nonprofit board was too time-consuming (and a little intimidating). So getting involved with a giving circle seemed like the perfect solution.

"You don't have to be Bill Gates or Warren Buffett to be a philanthropist," says Lind, who is managing director of Present Music. "In our giving circle, you just need to contribute a dollar a day, or \$365 a year, an amount most people can afford."

Everyday Philanthropists has 15 members and the group meets several times a year to research Milwaukee nonprofits, evaluate proposals and distribute funds. In 2006, it gave away \$6,000 to groups, including Neighborhood House, a family-oriented center that focuses on education and empowerment, and Meta House, a supervised home for paroled mothers and their children. One grant provided Meta House with desperately needed car seats to help indigent mothers take their children to pediatric visits and emergencies.

Everyday Philanthropists has also set up a template on its Web site (everydayphilanthropists.org) where people can create their own giving circle. After all, by working together, a little philanthropy goes a long way. ■