

The Philanthropist

Through the charitable foundation he established,
John Kellett supports important work in the community.
He urges the rest of us to do the same.

by Eric A.T. Dieckman
Photographs by John Conroy

Every now and then, you read about a philanthropist. Generally, you think nothing of it. “Philanthropist” is often interpreted as some kind of occupation, or another form of life entirely. They’re not one of us. But they’re human, not headlines. These are tangible people who lead ordinary lives. The only difference is that they want to make a difference. One such person is John Kellett.

Founder of the John Steven Kellett Foundation, the 78-year-old may not have made many headlines. But the Massachusetts native, and Phillips Academy and Massachusetts Institute of Technology alumnus, has effected a change in his community. He had been supporting local GLBT charities for some time, but

decided he wanted his estate to continue doing so after he was gone.

His foundation, established in 1992, serves his mission: “to provide funds, through other nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations serving Greater Houston, for worthy causes related to education about, gaining equal rights for, and

endowed, Kellett can make difference while he is alive. He can also have confidence now, knowing that his work will continue through his foundation.

The Kellett Foundation is no huge undertaking. The governing body: five people, Kellett included. The other four members are friends of his. They meet

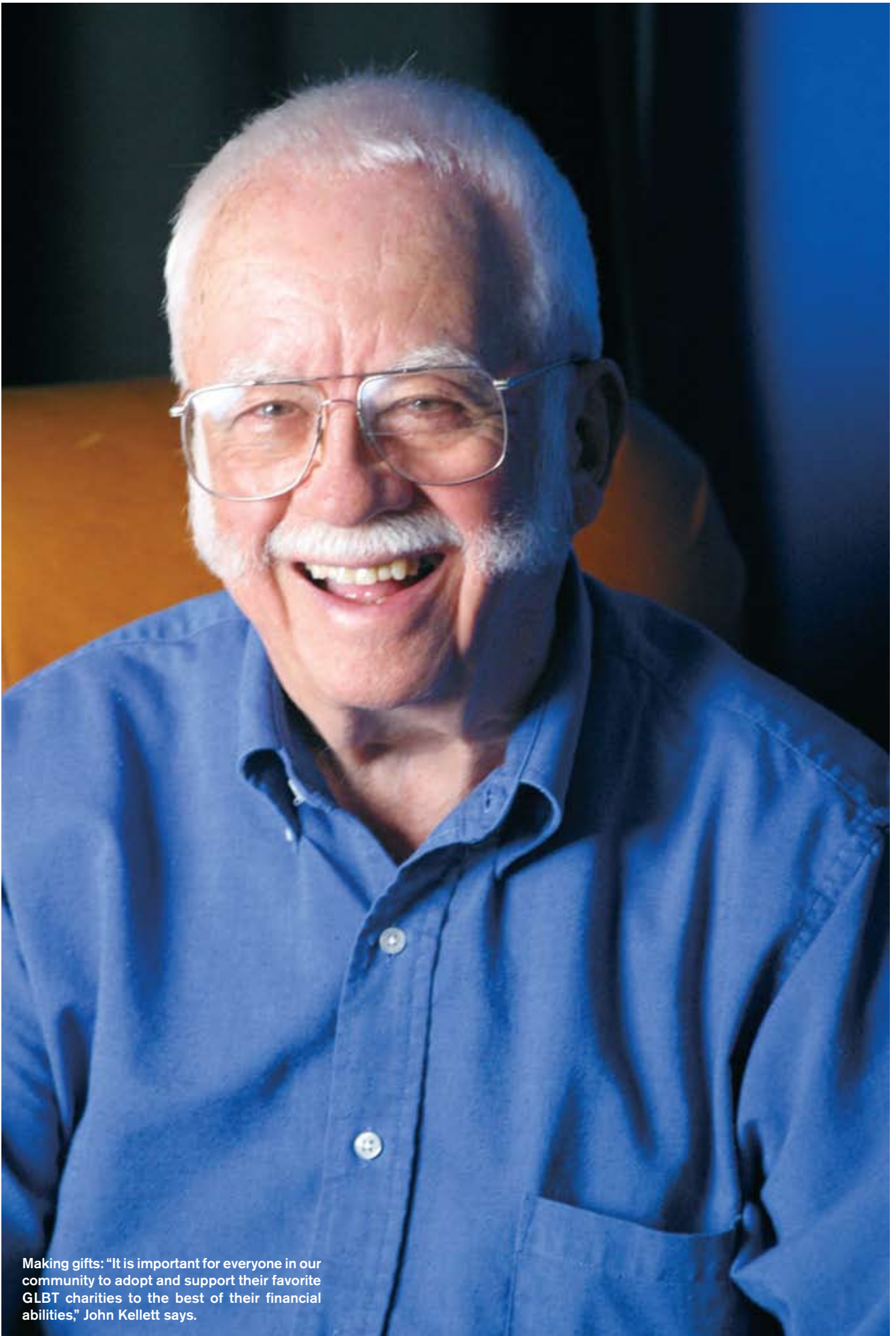
twice a year—once in spring, once in autumn. Kellett spends five to 10 hours a week conducting foundation business, mostly via e-mail—“and that’s about as much as I would want to spend,” he says. But with that unimposing commitment, about \$8,000 in grants were made in 2004 and 2003, up several thousand

dollars from past years.

Kellett keeps the foundation workload down by limiting applications for funding to groups that the board has contacted. Local organizations →

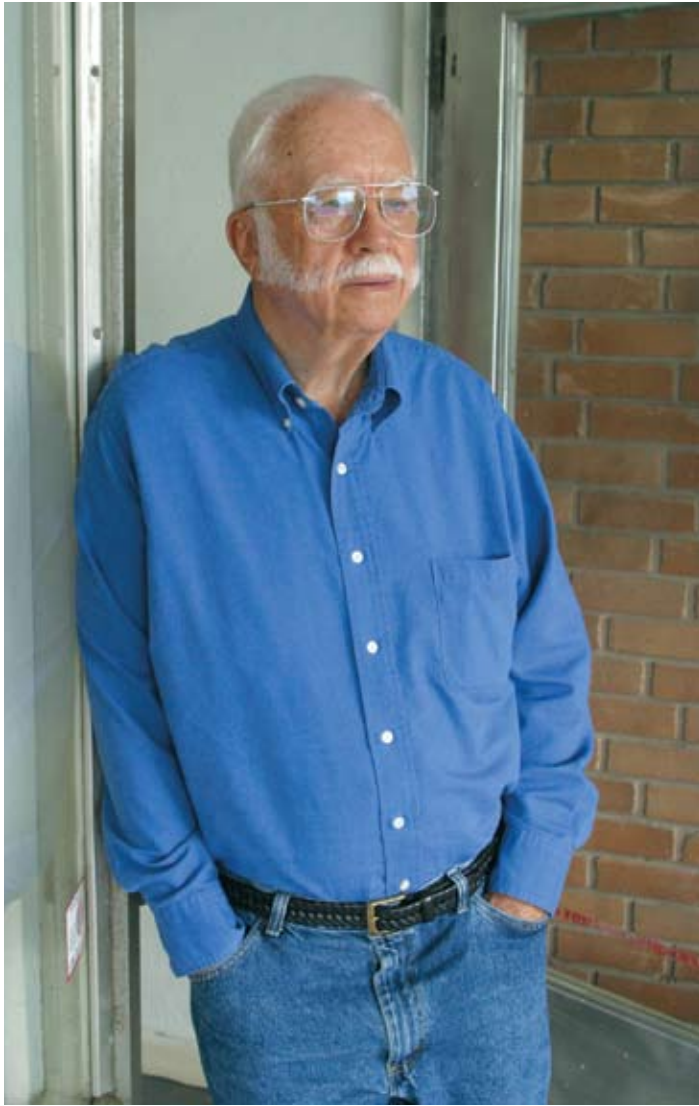
Local organizations including Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays-Houston, H.A.T.C.H., the Houston GLBT Community Center, Houston Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, Gay Men’s Chorus of Houston, Lesbian Health Initiative, and the Houston Transgender Unity Committee banquet and fundraiser have all received funding in past years.

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Face the future: John Kellett points out that his foundation has recently turned its attention to supporting GLBT seniors, "including those who might be pushed back in the closet by their needs for assisted living."

all received funding in past years. National organizations have also benefited from Kellett Foundation gifts. These have included In the Life (the monthly GLBT television news magazine that airs on PBS), the ACLU Foundation, Lambda Legal, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, and Victory Fund Leadership Institute.

"This past year, we added the PFLAG/HATCH Youth Scholarship Foundation," Kellett says. (Since its formation

10 years ago—first by PFLAG, then in conjunction with HATCH—that foundation has presented 107 scholarships worth \$490,000 to GLBT students attending college. HATCH, the program for GLBT and questioning youth ages 13–20 and part of Montrose Counseling Center, was originally an acronym for Houston Area Teen Coalition for Homosexuals. After the youth group became part of the counseling center in 2002, the center's board opted to use only the more commonly known shorthand brand.)

Kellett has a keen eye for the leaders of the future. Programs that train younger community members on becoming effective officers, board members, or other position holders of community nonprofit organizations are in his sights. "In this area, we have supported and encouraged Leading and Learning, conducted by the Houston GLBT Chamber of Commerce, and the more recent HATCH Youth Leadership Development Project."

Older members of the community are not overlooked by his foundation, Kellett says. "Our board has recently expressed interest in supporting efforts to help GLBT seniors, including those who might be pushed back in the closet by their needs for assisted living."

Kellett points out that reality of funding for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender causes compels all of us to make use of our resources.

"Since the GLBT community has many well-financed and organized enemies who believe tolerance is against their religion, and the overwhelming amount of money supporting GLBT issues comes from within the GLBT community, it is important for everyone in our community to adopt and support their favorite GLBT charities to the best of their financial abilities."

You meet someone like Kellett and have to ask yourself, What am I doing with my life? What can I do to make a difference? And if you haven't yet done it, start asking yourself that right now. ■

one last question

We asked John Kellett, via e-mail, a final question.

How do you want to be remembered when you're gone? What do you want on your tombstone?

"He was an active longtime member of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston, and strongly supported its principles." This may seem like a non sequitur, but it's not.

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