Barbara Edmond’s Opening Remarks

Hello all – what a great sight you are. Maine’s philanthropic sector is alive and well and all here gathered in one place. Those of you who represent and assist the best of charitable giving in Maine and those of you who provide the boots on the ground to turn that charity into action. It’s electric - We’ve been planning for this day for months and are delighted that you are all here.

MPC could never achieve a program of this scale without the support of many; First our generous sponsors. We are grateful to our two fabulous conference Co-Sponsors: Maine Health Access Foundation and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation for their wonderful support of this event and ongoing endorsement of MPC’s work. Thank you to our Partner Level Sponsors: Harpswell Capital Advisors, L.L. Bean, Inc., the Maine Community Foundation, the Sam L. Cohen Foundation, & US Representative Chellie Pingree and Donald Sussman who provided essential support to the program, and our Supporting Sponsors: the John T. Gorman Foundation & Northeast Delta Dental. We’d ask those sponsors who are present to please stand and allow us to give you a warm round of applause. Please take note of who these folks are and help us to continue to say thanks to them throughout the day.

And our very small and very new MPC staff would also never have been able to pull this conference off without some amazing volunteers. You will meet them all in a bit but I must take a moment to acknowledge my thanks to the Philanthropy Partners Conference Advisory Committee, and our Co-chairs Kathy Savesky, a philanthropic advisor with A Kinder World Foundation and Harris Parnell from the Offices of Donald Sussman. Unfortunately Harris is not with us as she is expecting a baby at any moment and her doctor wanted her to stay close to home. This committee had a real vision for what they wanted to day to be about and you will experience their touch everywhere. We can’t thank you enough.

All of us – the MPC board, staff, conference committee - are committed to making you feel welcome and have your conference experience go smoothly. So don’t be afraid to reach out. The name tag ribbons give us away – As Barbara Leonard shared earlier the Board is green, the staff is white and the Committee is blue. The orange ribbons are all our amazing presenters. And if you forget which color is which – no problem. We did that intentionally to give you a reason to start a conversation with us!
My sincere thanks to Barbara Leonard for her kind introduction and leadership and to thank all of you for such a warm welcome. I am very happy to be back in Maine, after a 9-year hiatus, and feel honored and privileged to be given this opportunity to work with all of you.

So, what ultimately attracted me to the work of the Maine Philanthropy Center? First, the mission and the vision that our wonderful leader Barbara Leonard just laid out. I saw this as an opportunity to continue what has really been my life’s work for over 30 years - encouraging people care for one another through the selfless giving of their time, talent and treasure. Second, the proposed direction and strategies of an amazing group of board members who are committed to make them happen: Enhanced relationships, connections and value for members, a focus on Diversity & inclusion and greater impact on issues that matter most. How could I not be excited about that work!

Once on board, I began to unravel how we can best move this mission and vision to action. While my thinking continues to evolve, I have landed on a few cornerstones.

First- What’s my job?

I’ve concluded that my job is to wake up every day, thinking about the power of philanthropy and ask how to MAKE GIVING COUNT.

Make Giving Count: How does that happen?–I think it centers around 3 things:

- Increasing the awareness of philanthropy
- Sharing the stories about the awesome work that charitable giving makes possible in hopes that others will be inspired to jump in
- We know that there is definitely room for growth.

While 2011 figures showed $816 million contributed, one in 4 Mainers who itemize their tax returns report making charitable contributions, and we rank 3rd in the country in the percent of estates with charitable bequests, we still remain in the bottom five among all states in overall individual giving (47th at last look) There is certainly room for growth. But awareness doesn’t help if you are not doing two other things:

- Increasing the effectiveness of philanthropy
- Increasing the impact of philanthropy

Effectiveness is a big deal and is extremely important. Are we as funders and nonprofits making the most effective use of the precious philanthropic dollars entrusted to us. To paraphrase the late Stephen Covey...you first need to be independently effective before you can be interdependently effective. We must first look within ourselves. How effective am I in my own work and then how effective is my organization? Each funder and each nonprofit must do the hard work to be accountable and independently stable. I must have my financial, governance
and staffing ducks in line. I must have my grant processes organized and focused. I must have my nonprofit’s services buttoned up and delivering with the highest quality. MPC works to help funders be the best they can be and our wonderful partners at MANP work to make nonprofits be the best they can be. But at the end of the day the first responsibility for effectiveness rests within each organization. You are each responsible for making your organization independently sound. And we have designed some sessions here at the conference, particularly this morning, to help you continue to do that.

But while independent effectiveness is important, it is not enough. It is necessary but not sufficient. I once had a volunteer who told me you can be accountable and be dead. He didn’t mean accountability wasn’t important but that it is simply tablestakes – the price of admission. You are not in the game unless you are actually doing something noteworthy. And I never forgot that. On my personal journey in this work...... After years of giving millions of dollars away through highly effective and accountable practices and processes but then having, year after year, to go back to donors and tell them that things are getting worse so please give more. You eventually have to ask yourself “What’s wrong with this picture?” That was a real wake up call. It’s not good enough. That experience brought me to the door of the notion of impact. What are we really doing, what impact are we having and what positive change are you making happen? At the end of the day it has to be about that.

And, once you think you have the impact question down, then it becomes a question of urgency.

Jeff Raikes – the retiring CEO of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was recently quoted as saying “What I admire in Bill and Melinda that I don’t see in philanthropy as a whole is a sense of urgency” Then he went on to say referring to polio in India ......these children are dying... Whether you are in agreement with Jeff Raikes’ perspective about the rest of philanthropy vis a vis the Gates, I don’t think you can quibble with the need for some notion of urgency. Since I believe however that most of us are still in the midst of figuring out impact, I will leave the notion of urgency out there as an aspirational frontier for another day.

Alas....Our work is never done! But we will never get to a genuine and justifiable sense of urgency, if we don’t first get clear about collective purpose and direction. And when we get serious about impact, we come to realize that it is only attainable if we work in concert with others. No one entity or sector is going to get it done alone. If we return to Stephen Covey’s construct ...it’s where we move from being independently sound to become interdependently strong. Or in the words of our conference theme, it’s how we get to synergy. It is the place where 1 + 1 equals 3. Synergy is “the interaction of multiple elements in a system to produce an effect different from or greater than the sum of its individual effects.” When the parts interact
effectively it produces a magical energy that allows the group to outperform even the best of its individual members and do more than was otherwise thought possible. Simply interacting and relating to one another in a business-as-usual way won’t get it done. It will take a willingness to go beyond one’s current purview, explore new dimensions and take some risks together ... It will require new thinking, new behavior and new action. That is our challenge for you for today and many of the conference sessions throughout the day are designed to help you do that.

But synergy will never be possible if we don’t begin with the end in mind, make a commitment to having real impact, and always keeping that in our sights. For me, my thinking started with a desire to make philanthropy more effective, but then I stopped myself and pushed myself to say: So what? Why make philanthropy in Maine more effective ... Who cares? To what end? I began to imagine what could happen if philanthropists, foundations, nonprofits, corporations government and everyday citizens were effectively and seamlessly working together and the end became clear to me...........to, through philanthropy, make Maine the best place for all people to live, work and play.

Broad I know but that’s my end game... That’s what I want to achieve synergy around.
What about you? What’s your end game?

And one more very important fact. Not everyone has the same end game. Not all nonprofits and all funders are working on the same thing. And, they shouldn’t be. But that is why it is so important to first find a mission match. Unless we recognize that and look for matches, we are simply spinning our wheels and wasting a lot of time and energy. The first step in Synergy starts with finding out who cares about the same things I do. Who is the 1+1? Who has the same end game? Who’s our peeps? Who’s our posse? You may already know some but my guess is that there are many more to uncover. And since this conference is totally designed to intentionally practice what we preach, we want today to be all about finding those right connections. Thus we have designed lots of opportunities for networking and some simple ways for you to begin figuring that out. Some of you may have already found these badges this morning in the pavilion. Yes the direction is to write down what you are currently working on. And it is perfectly fine to write down your current challenges... evaluation, staffing, effective philanthropy, etc. But I’d like to to challenge you to think bigger. Also write down your end game. And then network across the conference to find others who care about the same end game as you do. When we match, then we can be on our way to compare notes, can talk strategy, work towards the synergy. But with badges or not, we’re going to set the stage for this right now.
Take the next 15 seconds to stand up find someone you don’t know, introduce yourself, your organization and tell them your organizations’ end game. OK thanks for getting started! How many of you had the same end game? See your work is cut out for you. Imagine what could happen if we all got much better at finding people and organizations who care about the same end as we do, and then work to better understand each other, connect the dots and ultimately align our efforts. Imagine the potential synergy we could create.

Then we will truly have something to talk about and build awareness with. Then we will truly be able to inspire others to join us. Then we will truly make things happen. Thank you for letting me and MPC work with you on that journey.