

making a difference.



Clayton Rockefeller

MONOHASSET MILL PROJECT AND
THE STEEL YARD

CLAYTON ROCKEFELLER GREW UP feeling the considerable weight of his ancestors' philanthropic legacy. His great, great grandfather, John D. Sr., founder of the nineteenth-century industrial powerhouse Standard Oil, created the massive wealth that established the globally minded Rockefeller Foundation. His grandfather, David, helped establish the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (another grant-making organization) and has served as chairman of the Museum of Modern Art, Rockefeller University, and the Americas Society.

"I was fairly intimidated by my family's track record," Clay Rockefeller says. By the time he left Portland, Maine, to study at Brown University, "I was constantly feeling like I needed to be doing something, but I was thinking in terms of these unrealistic levels given my age and experience, and it almost locked me up, incapacitated me."

It was the unimaginable horror of the World Trade Center attacks that shook him out of his paralysis. In Brooklyn visiting his girlfriend that day, Rockefeller heard the first tower fall, then witnessed the crumbling of the second. "It sounds so cliched, but it brought me down to reality," he explains, "to who I am, what I can do, what's within my reach, as opposed to beating myself up for not doing more."

Now twenty-nine, Rockefeller has since carved out a distinct philanthropic niche in the long-neglected industrial area just west of downtown Providence. As a sculptor plugged into the city's burgeoning artistic community, Rockefeller has helped save not one, but two rundown mill properties from potential fates as generic luxury condos or factory outlet stores. Located side by side along the Woonasquatucket River, Monohasset Mill and the Providence Steel and Iron Co. are once again pulsing with productive energy, and, together, form || CONTINUED ON PAGE 141

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a complementary creative hub that nurtures both established and would-be artists.

Monohasset, a for-profit operation launched in 2001 by Rockefeller and three fellow artists, provides thirty-nine live/work housing units marketed specifically to artists, including ten subsidized units for lower-income buyers. (To date, all have been sold to working artists, including Rockefeller.)

Next door, the sprawling Steel Yard has been resurrected as a nonprofit industrial arts workshop, where a new generation of practitioners can learn the fading crafts of welding, bronze-casting and blacksmithing. The Steel Yard also rents its extensive metalworking facilities to artists, leases space to small arts-related businesses, and generates self-sustaining revenue through a manufacturing operation that churns out made-to-order functional art (see Social Venture Partners, page 78).

In order to get this amorphous operation up and running, in 2002, Rockefeller and a friend, Nick Bauta, formed a for-profit commercial real estate partnership that purchased the property and carries the debt load, thereby allowing the nonprofit entity “to grow up and build its own soul.”

While the Rockefeller name helped open doors and access to financing, the artists behind these projects were also aided by rising concern that the development boom spreading out of the city’s downtown would strip away what was left of the area’s rich industrial heritage. “The main spark for me was this belief that we can do better than just these very formulaic approaches to development,” Rockefeller says. At the same time, they are cleaning up a badly contaminated brownfield site, thanks to a \$400,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency.

These days, Rockefeller isn’t beating himself up for doing too little; rather, he’s trying to figure out how to do a little less. Having recently joined the board of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, a New York City-based nonprofit that provides research and counsel on charitable giving, Rockefeller says he has every intention of continuing to work on projects with a positive community impact—only at a slower pace. “I need to maintain personal sustainability as well,” he says. “I think there is something to be said for getting into a routine so you know when to stop.”  www.rockefellertrust.org