

## Charitable Giving: Suzanne Gouvernet

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JENNIFER LEONARD

Suzanne Gouvernet, at home in France.

One of Suzanne Gouvernet's most poignant childhood memories is dressing up at age eight for a visit to Manhattan's Frick Museum. "You'll see, it's like a fairy tale," her mother promised. But when they arrived, the guards would not admit her because she was too young. Suzanne was devastated, but fortunately the incident didn't have a lasting effect on her love of the arts.

She would grow up to be not just an art lover, but also a philanthropist whose support has benefited the Memorial Art Gallery and a host of other cultural organizations since she arrived in Rochester in 1982.

But first she would have to travel from New York City

to Vassar College to North Africa (where she met her husband, Gerard, while working for Tunisian National Radio) to Boston (where Gerard earned his Ph.D. from Harvard) and finally to Rochester (where he joined the foreign language faculty at SUNY Geneseo).

It's here that the couple put down roots and raised son Philippe. But they've also kept one foot firmly in Gerard's native France. Each summer for more than thirty years, they've packed up and headed to a rustic village in rural France, to a home dating in part to the 16th century.

While she enjoys the pace of village life, says Suzanne, it's a bit of a journey to the

nearest museum or opera venue. So when in Rochester she's frequently on the go, to music and theater performances and—of course—to the Gallery.

At MAG, she's been a generous donor to Let the Art Live On and recent annual campaigns and a long-time member of the Director's Circle.

She's also been generous with her time. Until recently she was a docent, and she's a long-time member of the Gallery Council, where in the 1990s she served two terms on the board as travel committee chair. This was no small job: the travel committee is one of the Council's most successful fund-raisers (p. 12 of this publication) because the chairs do much of the work usually provided by professional tour operators.

In 2006, through the Gouvernet Arts Fund at Rochester Area Community Foundation, Suzanne brought her support to a whole new level. A major gift helped underwrite two exciting but vastly different exhibitions—*Extreme Materials* and *Natura Morta: Italian Still-Life Painting and the Medici Collections*—as well as a lecture on Georgia O'Keeffe and an upcoming exhibition to be announced next year.

All the projects were chosen during thoughtful conversations with director Grant Holcomb.

"I asked Grant, what are the projects you're excited about? That's where I want the money to go."

In addition to MAG, Gouvernet is a long-time supporter of WXXI, a board member at Rochester Area Community Foundation and the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester, and a past board member of Friends of Eastman Opera. So it comes as no surprise that the Gouvernet Arts Fund has been selected to receive the 2007 "Champion of the Arts" award from the Arts & Cultural Council.

"Suzanne is a gracious, generous and long-time friend of the Memorial Art Gallery," says Holcomb, whose letter of nomination for the award was one of many. "Her love for, and support of, the arts is felt throughout our community."