

Charitable Giving: Robert L. and Mary L. Sproull



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In May 2005, Robert and Mary Sproull were photographed at the dedication of UR's Robert L. Sproull Center for Ultra High Intensity Laser Research.

If not for Robert L. Sproull, UR president emeritus, MAG might have a much different look today.

That's because in the early 1980s president Sproull wanted to see better use made of Cutler Union, the former women's student union on the Gallery grounds. He initiated a dialogue between the Eastman School, which was using the building intermittently, and the Gallery, for which it would be an integral part of the 1987 expansion.

The dialogue ended happily: Today, Cutler Union houses administrative offices, the Creative Workshop, Cutler's Restaurant and income-producing rental spaces for a greatly expanded museum.

Academic years

It wasn't Sproull's first experience with a museum expansion. He was a physics professor at his alma mater, Cornell University, when that institution appointed him vice president for academic affairs; he was heavily involved when Cornell hired international superstar I. M. Pei to design its campus art museum.

Recruited by the University of Rochester, Sproull became vice president and provost in 1968 and president in 1970; from 1974 until his retirement in 1984, he also served as CEO. Entire articles have been written about Sproull's many board appointments and consultancies with the likes of the National Academy of Sciences,

the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense.

These days, he has a new passion: the Environmental Literacy Council, a 10-year-old, DC-based nonprofit that critiques high school science texts. (Sproull knows something about textbooks; the classic *Modern Physics*, which he co-authored, was the first book entered into UR's new barcoding system in 1980.)

Supporting the arts

But art is also very much a part of Sproull's life. His Pittsford home, he's the first to tell you, contains more art books than science texts. That's due in large part to his wife, Mary, an artist whose vibrant landscapes hang on the walls. "I've been painting for a long, long time," says Mary, who once studied with Dorothy Glaser at the Creative Workshop—before being UR's first lady got in the way.

Even in retirement, the couple stays so busy that she finds it hard to paint every day. In August, they had just returned from a Colorado conference and were gearing up for a visit from children and grandchildren. But when she does paint, Mary Sproull has a willing accomplice in her husband, who crafts the frames for her work.

At the Gallery, the Sproulls belong to the Director's Circle, and Mary Sproull is

a long-time member of the Gallery Council. In addition to their annual support, the couple recently established an endowment that will benefit future exhibitions and related programming.

"We take great pride in showing the Gallery to visitors," says Sproull, who credits director Grant Holcomb for turning MAG into "a very interesting, dynamic place. We like to help along an institution that has so much going for it."

Enriching the community

The Gallery is not the only organization benefitting from the couple's generosity. They've done much for Deep Springs, the California work study college where Robert Sproull spent two years at the height of the Great Depression. And in 2003, in the latest of many gifts to UR, they endowed a discretionary fund to be used by the dean of arts, sciences and engineering. In recognition, the deanship was named in their honor.

"Together, the Sproulls embody so many important social, intellectual and cultural values," says Grant Holcomb. "Certainly, leadership, dedication, creativity and philanthropy come immediately to mind. This community has truly been enriched by their many contributions over the years."