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NEWS

The Office That Gives

Worcester philanthropist Warner Fletcher to receive T&G's Isaiah Thomas Award

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Warner Fletcher is photographed in the offices of Fletcher Tilton in downtown Worcester.
T&G STAFF PHOTO/RICK CINCLAIR

WORCESTER — Warner S. Fletcher keeps three computer stations in his office, which seems odd until he explains that he uses one computer and his fellow trustees in a charitable trust use the others.

In fact, that's what makes the office at the law firm of Fletcher Tilton, where Mr. Fletcher, 72, is a director and lawyer with expertise in trusts and estates, so much more than just his office.

The corner perch on the 11th floor of the Guaranty Building on Main Street is also home to the George I. Alden Trust, one of Worcester's most important sources of funds for nonprofits.

Most mornings, Mr. Fletcher and three other Alden trustees work there.

Yet what the office does not convey so easily is how far Mr. Fletcher's involvement in Worcester's charitable scene stretches beyond the Alden Trust. The son of a venerable Worcester family, Mr. Fletcher sits on boards with combined assets of more than \$250 million.

He has helped dispense millions of dollars in grants, advocated for a university he never attended and made time for a charity devoted to needy pets.

"He loves Worcester," said Allie Tellier, executive director of the Worcester Animal Rescue League, a shelter where Mr. Fletcher is board president. "And he loves caring for those in the community, whether they have two legs, four legs, fur or feathers."

For his service to the community, Mr. Fletcher has been named recipient of the Isaiah Thomas Award, presented by the Telegram & Gazette.

Mr. Fletcher will be honored Dec. 16 at Mechanics Hall during "A Legendary Evening," a benefit to raise money for the Telegram & Gazette Santa and featuring a talk by former New England Patriots football player Tedy Bruschi. The award is named for a Colonial-era printer, patriot and philanthropist.

If you ask Mr. Fletcher, he'll tell you that he considers himself lucky. He grew up in Worcester, one of three children.

His mother, Marion Stoddard Fletcher, was the daughter of a former president of Wyman-Gordon Co., a leading producer of industrial forgings. His father, Paris Fletcher, was so involved in Worcester boards and organizations that a wag speaking of the hunt for

charity funding in the city coined the phrase, "All roads lead to Paris."

Mr. Fletcher attended Worcester's Bancroft School, the Choate School in Connecticut and Williams College in Williamstown. He served in the Navy for three years during the Vietnam War, then went to the Boston University School of Law. After graduating in 1973, he returned to Worcester to work at the law firm bearing his family's name. He's been there ever since.

His brother is Allen W. Fletcher, former owner of Worcester Magazine and an advocate for Worcester's Canal District.

When he first arrived back in Worcester, Mr. Fletcher said, he was oblivious to a lot of his family's involvement in philanthropy. Yet he knew that his name was recognized in the city.

"That kind of pedigree, doors got opened to me, just because I was the son of Paris Fletcher," he said.

His philosophy about philanthropy revolves around making Worcester better off for the people who live there, he said.

"Hopefully you're going to take it seriously and try as conscientiously as you can to make

sure that the grants that you make to the organizations that you fund are well thought out, evenly considered and used to produce results," he said.

Over the years, Mr. Fletcher sat on the boards of organizations large and small, including some that no longer exist. He found he enjoyed the experience of trying to help, even when organizations ran into trouble, he said.

"I think if you don't find it is enjoyable – not that it always is – or meaningful, then you're probably not going to do it, which is probably just as well, because if you don't enjoy it, and you don't show up, that doesn't help anybody," he said.

Paul J. Levenson, executive director of the Worcester-based Massachusetts Symphony

Orchestra, said Mr. Fletcher has a low-key manner and sense of humor that puts people at ease but also demands that those seeking funds present realistic, well-considered plans.

"He has an ability to take in a lot of information, digest it and make really excellent decisions for the community, and he does this all under the radar," Mr. Levenson said.

In addition to the Alden Trust, which focuses on donating to capital projects for educational institutions, Mr. Fletcher is involved in the Stoddard Charitable Trust, the Wyman-Gordon Foundation, the Fletcher Foundation and the Hoche-Schofield Foundation. The Stoddard trust was primarily funded by his grandfather and had \$59 million in net assets at the end of 2015, according to state records.

Mr. Fletcher also serves on the board of the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and is an emeritus trustee at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. The university gave Mr. Fletcher an award for distinguished service in 2011, calling him a tireless advocate for WPI who had followed in his parents' footsteps in supporting WPI.

Mr. Fletcher and his wife, Mary, have been married for 48 years. They have three sons and seven grandchildren. Mr. Fletcher and his wife live in the Worcester house he grew up in, and he said one of the things he prizes about Worcester is its size: small enough to see the direct benefits of good works.

"There isn't a place I'd rather have been than Worcester," he said.