

PHILANTHROPY

Don Hutson

The Memphis-based motivational speaker has been honored nationally.



... BY TONI LEPESKA

The title **philanthropist** means so much more than someone who gives money away. At least, that's how Don Hutson sees it. Everyone has three things to give, he says, and only one of them is money. Earlier this year, the National Speakers Association bestowed Hutson with its "Philanthropist of the Year" award.

Hutson, 74, is a salesman, prolific author, and nationally recognized speaker who helped found NSA in 1973. He is a founding member of the Memphis Society of Entrepreneurs and a past president. He also is CEO of U.S. Learning, which provides corporate training to businesses all over the nation. The client list includes local businesses such as FedEx, International Paper, and Medtronic.

Born in Oklahoma while his father served in the Navy, Hutson landed in Memphis because of his parents' roots in Mississippi. "I didn't care for Oklahoma so I moved to Memphis when I was 6 months old," he says. He pauses. "That's my story and I'm stickin' to it."

He grew up in Whitehaven and sold men's clothing after school and on Saturdays. By then, his father was in real estate. He instilled in his son the unshakable idea that "there was unlimited opportunity in sales," Hutson says. "I was motivated and worked hard."

Impressed, his father gave Hutson a job selling real estate. Hutson was working on a degree in sales at the University of Memphis at the time. "I wore a suit and tie just to look a little older," he says. After college he became the top salesperson in a national training organization and delivered presentations to more than 4,500 small groups, building his selling and speaking experience. In 1969, he started his own company, the forerunner to U.S. Learning. He grew and evolved the company, flying coast to coast to hold seminars. He then came in demand as a speaker.

Today, though Hutson still travels extensively to hold seminars, U.S. Learning's revenue comes largely from online training programs. Hutson is the author or co-author of 14 books, including *The One Minute Negotiator: Simple Steps to Reach Better Agreements*, a *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* best seller.

Next year, Hutson will celebrate 50 years in his profession, and though nationally recognized and



Don Hutson has been named "Philanthropist of the Year" by the National Speakers Association.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN PULVER PHOTO

internationally exposed, he's kept his brand in Memphis. "I'm dedicated to Memphis," he says. "We've had second homes here and there but right now we don't. There are some remarkable people here and remarkable organizations."

Hutson participates in a lot of those organizations. In his busy life, there is lots of room for giving and for philanthropic endeavors. Junior Achievement of Memphis and the Mid-South is one nonprofit that has been on the receiving end of his generosity.

The organization, dedicated to educating students about entrepreneurship, work



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readiness, and financial literacy, reaches 26,000 students a year. It relies solely on individual and corporate donations and on fundraisers, says Larry Colbert, president and CEO. Hutson is a former board member. About five years ago, Colbert presented Hutson JA's "Humanitarian Award" as Hutson was stepping down from the board for other duties within the nonprofit.

Hutson has waived speaking fees to address JA students, Colbert says, and provided books to student libraries. He's given to operational accounts, and when he cannot personally fill a need, gets on the telephone to find someone who can.

"I've never called on him for anything that he didn't respond in kind; he has a huge heart," says Colbert. "He is good for Memphis."

The organizations Hutson supports include St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Boys & Girls Clubs, the University of Memphis Society of the Shield, and the Memphis Food Bank. He is on the board of Arise2Read, an early-childhood literacy supporter. He is a member of the Danny Thomas St. Jude Society and a past chairman of the International Children's Heart Foundation, which sends surgeons overseas to conduct operations on babies' malformed hearts. "You never know who you're saving when you save a kid," says Hutson, who admits a soft spot for nonprofits that serve children and youth. "It may be a kid 30 years from now who develops a cure for cancer."

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Mentors helped form Hutson's philosophy on giving over the years. He was in his 20s when he was exposed to speaker and author Cavett Roberts, an NSA founder. "He was a very generous man," Hutson says. "He said just help people . . . don't even keep score." He also taught a philosophy Hutson embraces today: "You can't out-give yourself. If you come from a place of abundance rather than scarcity, you're going to give more. You're going to get more."

To give from abundance, Hutson says, means to give from a mind or spirit of abundance — from a big, giving heart, not necessarily from deep pockets. It means to have an authentic desire to help others.

While accepting the Nido Qubein Philanthropist of the Year Award at the NSA convention in Phoenix, Arizona, Hutson talked about the "only three things we can give away."

"The first is love," he says. "I'm here for you. You unselfishly give time and support." The second thing anyone can give away is expertise, Hutson says. One thing he's given away is his experience in strategic planning. He's also helped recruit donors to organizations he supports.

The third thing is what Hutson calls "treasure." That's money. "I've done my share of that," he says, "but I haven't done it as much as a lot of people in town."

The most dedicated will give all three to the organization or charity, and by doing so significantly discover "abounding joy is the result."

Brad Champlin, who worked for an organization that assisted nonprofits after retiring as an executive at a holding company that owned Regions Bank, says nonprofits frequently called on Hutson to emcee events but "he's also good behind the scenes." And yet, he often ended up in leadership, Champlin says. "A lot of us join organizations. Don invariably ends up being chairman of the organizations. He's a person that's there for other people. He's a blessing to the community."

Karl Schledwitz, CEO of Monogram Foods, hired Hutson for speaking and training purposes, but got to know him socially as well. "He's a great example of someone who is always trying to help others," Schledwitz says.

Colorado resident Mark Sanborn, a previous NSA Philanthropist of the Year, presented Hutson his award on behalf of the honor's namesake. He said the award goes to high profile philanthropic members, and Hutson fit the bill. "He's always been very generous in his support of people," said Sanborn, who counts Hutson among his closest of business associates. "And he's one of the most positive and grateful people I know."

Hutson affirmed Sanborn's assessment of the role gratitude has in generosity. Gratitude begets optimism, he says. "In my prayers, gratitude comes first. Gratitude makes it easier to have a giving spirit." 🐾