Sheryl Crow
Fine being ‘myself’
Humanitarian Efforts

Even small attempts to give can turn into something big

BY CINDY KUZMA

You've spent years amassing experience, a network and resources. Now, use them to change the world. Here's advice from four women who've prioritized philanthropy and encourage you to do the same:
LEVERAGE YOUR SKILLS

Chef Cat Cora — best known as the first female resident Iron Chef on Food Network’s Iron Chef America — spends her days surrounded by food. As a result, she’s moved to aid those with none.

For more than 12 years, her nonprofit Chefs for Humanity (chefsforhumanity.org) has marshaled culinary resources for disaster response. After Hurricane Katrina, damaged restaurants and casinos had large volumes of food that had to be cooked quickly. The organization deployed chefs to turn the food into meals for the displaced and first responders.

“Everyone has a knowledge of something that’s useful,” says Cora, 50, of Santa Barbara, Calif. “Use that to give back.”

IGNITE YOUR PASSION

Cindy Crosby always lived close to nature, so she felt apprehensive about moving to the Chicago suburbs 20 years ago. It turned out that her Glen Ellyn, Ill., home was just steps from the 1,700-acre Morton Arboretum (mortonarb.org).

Now, the 56-year-old freelance writer spends 200 volunteer hours a year caring for and educating people about the tallgrass prairie preserved at the arboretum. Inspired, she recently completed a master’s degree and a book, The Tallgrass Prairie: An Introduction.

Crosby says her unpaid hours feel energizing, not burdensome: “When you’re working in your sweet spot, your gratitude expands. It brings me tremendous joy.”

MAKE A FINANCIAL CASE

In 2011, Paula “Pixie” Dezzutti Hewlette, 54, had a vision: a company that combined charity with celebration.

Now, Local Choice Spirits — her boutique alcohol company in Charleston, S.C. — gives $2 per bottle sold through its #PourItForward initiative (localchoicespirits.com/pouritforward) to community organizations.

This type of cause marketing has become essential to profitability, says the powerhouse mother of nine.

“The greatest chance of sustainable revenue will come from the point where a company shifts to something bigger than themselves,” she says. “You can call that philanthropy, or just smart business.”