

Berkeley Nobel laureates donate prize money to charity

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Astrophysicist George Smoot won the Nobel Prize for his work explaining the birth of the universe. Now he's looking to get a philanthropic Big Bang for his bucks, donating prize winnings to charity.

"I thought it would be good to make it possible for the next generation to come along," Smoot said Thursday.

Smoot is the second Berkeley scientist in recent years to demonstrate Nobel benevolence. Daniel L. McFadden, a 2000 winner in economics, donated winnings to the same charity Smoot chose, the Oakland-based **East Bay Community Foundation**.

"There's something special about having someone who's won the Nobel prize make the decision to work with you," said Chris Nicholson, vice president of development for the **foundation**, which manages almost \$270 million in charitable funds for individuals, businesses and other groups.

Nicholson said the scientists, who both shared their awards with a co-winner, gave a "substantial" portion of their prizes, which vary by year due to currency fluctuations but were worth \$1.4 million last year. (In 2000, the prize was smaller, 9 million kronor vs. the current 10 million, and equaled about \$940,000.)

Smoot, who is donating his winnings minus the cost of the trip to Sweden for the awards ceremony last December, pointed out that giving away the money makes financial sense because taxes would have taken another half had he kept it — still a nice sum, but much smaller than the potential of his donated funds.

The **East Bay foundation** handles paperwork, takes care of tax implications and provides research and results tracking if requested. A donor-advised fund is held in the name of the giver, who then recommends making grants to charities.

Smoot plans to use the money to grant fellowships to graduate and postdoctoral students. He also intends to collaborate with the UC Berkeley **Foundation** on establishing a center that would train high school students in science and continue cosmology research.

Smoot and McFadden aren't the first to demonstrate laureate largesse.

Gunter Blobel, a German-born American whose family took shelter in Dresden toward the end of World War II, donated most of his nearly \$1 million prize in 1999 to restoring the city's cathedral, wrecked by Allied bombs.

In 1979, Mother Teresa used her Nobel Peace Prize cash award of \$192,000 to help finance her charitable work helping India's poor.

In Berkeley, a number of other award winners also have given to the **East Bay Community Foundation**.

McFadden, who was awarded his prize for his work in the study of how people make economic choices, could not be reached by The Associated Press on Thursday. He said in a statement released by the **foundation** that he doesn't think of philanthropy in abstract terms but "in personal terms, helping family and helping your **community** as your extended family."

Besides the Nobel laureates, other Berkeley award-winners who have donated money to the **East Bay** charity include Richard Gilbert, a longtime economics professor, and math professor Elwyn Berlekamp, who was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1999.

Nuclear physicist and element hunter Albert Ghiorso, still working at nearly 92, is also a donor, establishing two funds on behalf of two late colleagues, physicists J.M. Nitschke and Glenn T. Seaborg, a 1951 Nobel winner for chemistry.

For Smoot, the donation is a continuation of his efforts to make the science of the cosmos more accessible.

He recently led the Cal marching band in a reenactment of the Big Bang with tubas standing in for a spiral galaxy and drums providing the bang. The band played Stevie Wonder's "Another Star," as the musicians scattered to demonstrate the expansion of the universe.

Smoot played a video of the performance when he accepted his prize in Stockholm.

"There's the research and then there's the education and then there's the outreach," he said Thursday. Filling the public in on his work is important "because they're funding the research," he said, "but also, we live in a technical society, so people have to understand science and feel comfortable about it."