

Santa Barbara

MAGAZINE

GIVING BACK

JUNE/JULY 2003

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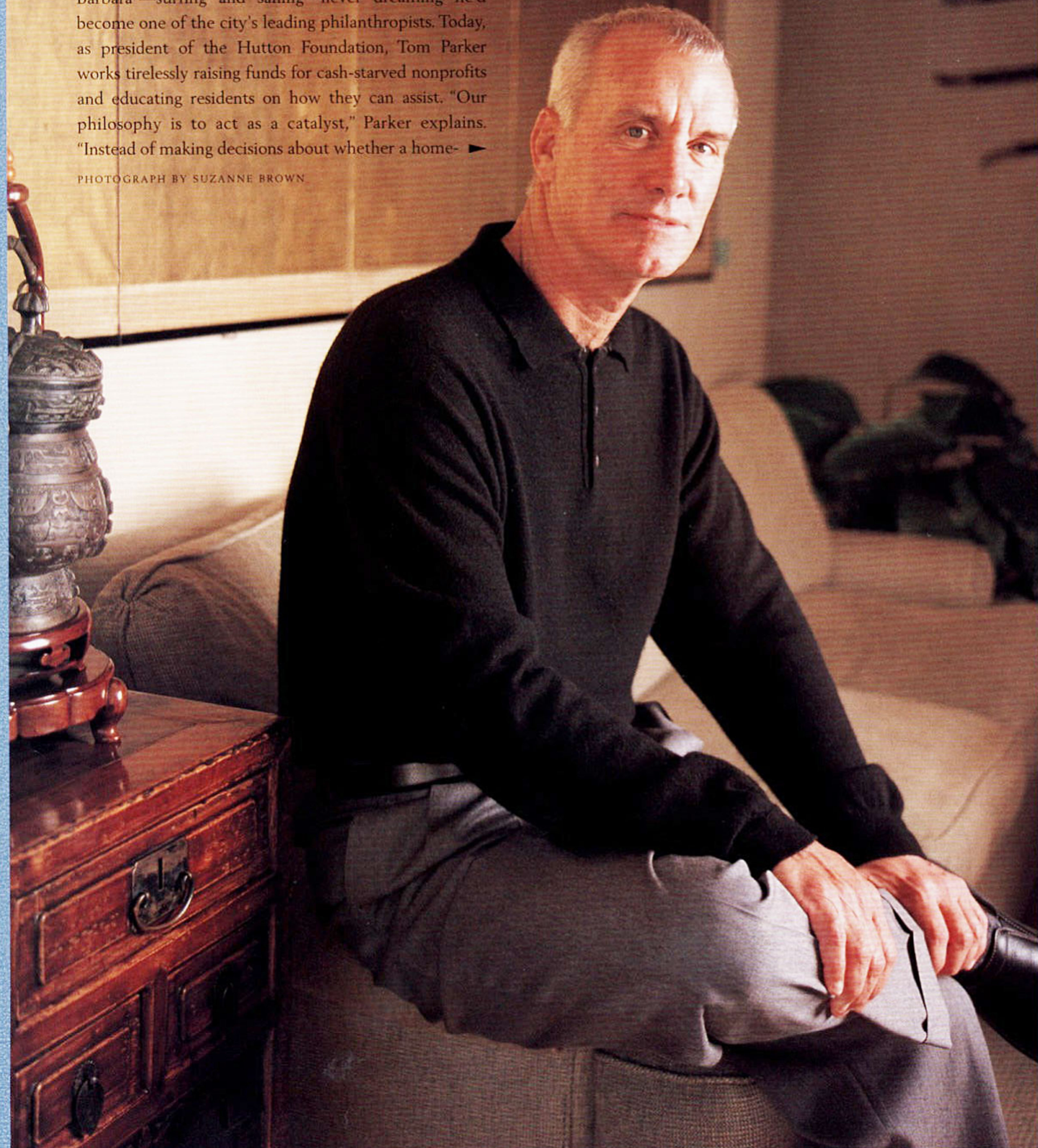
Tom Parker

Meeting a collective challenge

BY BROOKE COMER

HE GREW UP "DOING WHAT EVERYBODY DOES IN SANTA Barbara"—surfing and sailing—never dreaming he'd become one of the city's leading philanthropists. Today, as president of the Hutton Foundation, Tom Parker works tirelessly raising funds for cash-starved nonprofits and educating residents on how they can assist. "Our philosophy is to act as a catalyst," Parker explains. "Instead of making decisions about whether a home- ▶

PHOTOGRAPH BY SUZANNE BROWN



less shelter has more value than an art museum, we try to get the community as a whole interested in helping."

How did this athletic teenager who excelled in math at Santa Barbara High School grow to have such a deep appreciation for helping others? "I just fell into philanthropy," he admits. "I always loved this city, the people in it and all that it had to offer. But I never knew that there was so much that could be done."

Parker, the only son of a local butcher, attended California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks on a football scholarship. He married his college sweetheart, Sue, went on to earn an MBA at Cal Lutheran and then began teaching high school eco-

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nomics in Ventura. Though his younger sister is a kindergarten teacher, Parker never viewed the classroom as part of his career plan.

He left teaching to start a real estate development business with a few college friends. Parker did so well that in 1984 his aunt by marriage, Betty Hutton, asked him to run her Orange County real estate investment company "with the understanding that we'd develop the company, putting whatever we made together into a charitable foundation."

For the last 19 years, Parker has spent weekdays working down south and weekends back home with his

wife and sons, Jess and Chris. In that time, company profits soared, boosting the foundation's net worth. Hutton died in 1995, leaving Parker to guide The Hutton Companies, "although philanthropy takes up more and more of my time," he says.

The Hutton Foundation funnels grants and cash donations to more than 200 Santa Barbara County organizations each year. The choices reflect Parker's true interests of improving the plight of the under-served and expanding the city's cultural horizon.

But Parker knows the foundation cannot operate in a vacuum; its success relies on networking with others. Therefore he shares his moneymaking and fund-raising prowess as a member of numerous boards and committees, including those serving Santa Barbara City College, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, the Santa Barbara Mental Health Association and the Coalition to Provide Shelter for the Homeless. He is also vice president of the board of directors of the Santa Barbara Foundation, the dean of local philanthropies created in 1928 by business magnate Max Fleischmann.

Parker, like Fleischmann, has an unyielding focus on raising money locally to strengthen independent nonprofits because, he says, they "do the kind of things that the government used to do, but do them far more effectively. We have volunteers who can make a connection with other people and solve problems in the community. This completes the circle. Capitalism is wonderful, but without the nonprofit sector, it doesn't have heart."

One of Parker's proudest achievements is establishing the Hutton

Foundation's loan program five years ago. Monies from the foundation's core assets are loaned to nonprofits for use in an array of needs, from refinancing existing debt to renovating facilities to buying new buildings.

From 2000 to 2001, Parker served as president of the Foundation Roundtable that brings together leaders of 35 area foundations each month to discuss how best to serve the community's needs. "We're part of a team, working together to make the community stronger."

And their collective challenge is growing. An economic recession coupled with falling stock prices has left many nonprofits in need of

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more money at a time when the assets of donor groups are shrinking.

Parker says the Hutton Foundation's endowment remains steady at \$52 million to \$54 million, "but it's a challenge to meet everyone's needs in today's economy. They're the financial engine that drives the system and we, as funders, need to make sure that our nonprofits can continue to bring services to people who need them more than ever before." ❖

Brooke Comer is a frequent contributor to Santa Barbara Magazine.