

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

University of Regina

Philanthropist and business leader creating positive change

Paul J. Hill is widely recognized as a business leader, but he's equally well-known for giving back. The University of Regina is recognizing his contributions with an honorary degree, to be presented June 9 at spring convocation.

"I'm honoured and I'm humbled," Hill says of the degree. "It was an honour I didn't expect."

His honorary degree recognizes the imprint he has made on Regina and on Saskatchewan and, for that matter, on Canada. Hill is the chairman, president and CEO of The Hill Companies and Harvard Developments. And while his business acumen alone would be worthy of an honorary degree, he is also making a significant impact in the world through his philanthropy.

Throughout the years Hill has shown a decided interest in supporting education. In 2007, he gave \$10 million, still the largest gift ever donated to the University of Regina, to establish the Paul J. Hill School of Business.

Hill and his wife Carol also established a foundation called "One Life Makes a Difference" that enables a student from a disadvantaged background to attend a school, improving the odds they will make it to university. However, Hill determined that wasn't enough, which led him to yet another ambitious project.

"When I grew up in Regina, we didn't have an inner-city problem with crime and a 90 per cent school dropout rate," Hill observes. "While there are many organizations doing good things to address inner-city problems, I saw an opportunity when by chance I learned about NativityMiguel schools in the United States."

NativityMiguel middle schools offer inner-city students a longer school day and a longer school year, in classes averaging no more than 20 students. They have turned 90 per cent dropout rates into 90 per cent high school graduation rates. Many of the schools' graduates go on to success in post-secondary education.

For the past two and a half years Hill has been working towards establishing a NativityMiguel school in Regina. That work will come to fruition this fall when Mother Teresa Middle School opens its doors to 20 Grade 6 students. Eventually it will have about 15 to 20 kids each in Grades 6, 7 and 8.

"We've been working with the inner-city schools, finding the one or two students who can go on and be successful," Hill explains. "We'd like to increase that to 20 students. We hope Mother Teresa Middle School will make a difference."

Asked if he feels a sense of satisfaction now that all the groundwork has been completed, he replies, "I think it will help address the challenges we face in inner-city Regina," echoing the spirit of optimism that has animated the Hill family over the years.