

Philanthropy provides opportunities for other people, Bondar tells Peterborough's Philanthropy Forum



By [Jessica Nyznik](#), The Peterborough Examiner
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Roberta Bondar is framed by a self portrait she shot during astronaut training as she speaks to a crowd at Market Hall Wednesday, November 16, 2016. Bondar was the keynote speaker at Philanthropy Forum 2016. JESSICA NYZNIK/Peterborough Examiner/Postmedia Network

When Dr. Roberta Bondar looked down at the earth from space, she saw the planet in a whole new way.

It's a phenomenon the former astronaut can only describe as meeting someone you've read about before they walk in a room. They become three dimensional, you make eye contact, and you bond.

"That's the way I felt when I looked at the earth ... I had to actually see it in the context of the black universe to actually cement the emotion of it being a planet," Bondar said.

Bondar, 70, was the first Canadian woman and the world's first neurologist in space. She's also a photographer, speaker and former chancellor at Trent University.

She was the keynote speaker at the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough's Philanthropy Forum 2016 on Wednesday night at Market Hall.

When Bondar returned to earth after her spaceflight in 1992, she wanted to continue her exploration of earth.

Eventually she travelled to Canada's national parks to capture what she saw through images, later going to Africa.

After serving two terms as chancellor at Trent from 2003 to 2009, Bondar wondered what was next.

That's when she looked back at her childhood, and to the three most important things to her growing up: inspiration, tools and skills, and the safety net her family provided.

And those three things are what philanthropy is all about, she said.

"If any of this sounds familiar, you understand what philanthropy is all about - it's about providing those kinds of opportunities for other people and for oneself."

Philanthropy is also about continuing to provide those opportunities going forward, she added.

"It's not just about connecting the dots at the beginning, but about keeping those dots connected and about adding more and more dots."

Bondar's love of the natural world prompted her to create the Roberta Bondar Foundation, an environmentally focused charity.

Through the foundation, she uses photography to stimulate interest in the environment.

"We're trying to get people now to connect with nature by taking artistic images of nature. And when you take the time to take a good image, you really bond with what the subject matter is."

When Bondar was asked to be a chancellor at Trent, she said she didn't have deeply lined pockets, but she did have a deeply lined brain, and it was something she wanted to share with the community.

Volunteerism is also a form of philanthropy because it involves sacrifice. It's a sacrifice of time and like the old saying goes, time is money, she said.

Though philanthropy is often associated with money, you don't need deeply lined pockets to be philanthropic.

"Everybody can be a philanthropic individual because volunteerism is at the core of it."

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