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DAME STEVE SHIRLEY AND TIM SMIT ARE KEYNOTE SPEAKERS FOR DEVON'S FIRST EVER 'PHILANTHROPY FORECAST'

The first ever 'Philanthropy Forecast' will take place at the Met Office today, with keynote speakers Dame Steve Shirley, Ambassador for Philanthropy and Eden's Tim Smit sharing their ideas about how to make a real difference to society and the communities in which we live, through giving.

The Forecast, which is sponsored by Coutts, is the brainchild of the charity, Devon Community Foundation which over the past two years has seen its Endowment Fund increase ten-fold from £180,000 to £1.8 million, despite the recession.

"As the gap between the haves and have nots has increased, those who do have the ability to give have taken up the challenge and come onboard. Their desire to make a difference to their local community and improve the lives of vulnerable local people struggling with issues like isolation, disability and disadvantage can be seen in the massive increase in our Endowment," explains, Martha Wilkinson, Chief Executive of Devon Community Foundation, which is one of 56 Foundations across the UK tackling social exclusion at grassroots level.

The growth in Devon Community Foundation's Endowment reflects a national trend, with a 28% rise in donations to Community Foundations across the country over the last year and a 60% rise in individuals and companies setting up their own charitable Funds with Community Foundations to give back to local community projects in their name. The recent Sunday Times Giving List also noted an increase in real terms in giving, with almost £2.5 billion being directed to charitable causes in the past year.

Keynote speaker Dame Shirley, who began her life in the UK as a Jewish child refugee and went on to set up the multi-million Xansa software company and then give away £50 million to autism related projects through her own charitable foundation will share with guests her ideas about giving as a pleasurable act and a social and cultural activity, rather than simply a financial transaction. She explains, "I have been promoting philanthropy as a

pleasurable act of desire and compassion which can be used to challenge or change society. Giving is a gift to yourself and gives you the internal satisfaction that you have made something better.”

Tim Smit will share his stories about the impact the Eden as a charity has made on environmental issues and his commitment to the Big Lunch initiative, which will d encourages local communities to get closer by coming together to share lunch on July 18th.

Dame Shirley, will also talk about learning to give wisely, using Community Foundations as way to direct money to local causes which make a difference by supporting local volunteers who are on the frontline in tackling issues in their local communities. To date Devon Community Foundation has made over £7 million in grants to small voluntary and community groups in the county who are doing just that.

..... Managing Partner of Coutts who are sponsoring the event explains, “Often people want to give something back but don’t know where to start. We work alongside the Community Foundation Network to give our clients a perspective on how to give locally in a way which is personal, cost-effective and helps to make a bigger difference. It’s particularly exciting at this time, with Devon Community Foundation’s ability to match the value of all donations made until March 2011.”

Chief Executive of Devon Community Foundation, Martha Wilkinson adds, “David Cameron’s new idea about the Big Society, putting power into the hands of communities to change their lives for the better is something which Community Foundation’s have been doing for many years. As public sector cuts start to hit, volunteers and charities will become increasingly important in helping to deliver more caring and better communities for everyone We hope the event will help to inspire those who can to use their giving, skills and personal commitment to work with us to make this a reality in Devon.”

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