

5/12/10

NY Times Article:

Charly Kleissner, 50, an engineer with what he calls a "very very successful career in Silicon Valley" has focused on philanthropy for the past six years, and together with his wife Lisa runs their family foundation, which is endowed with \$11 million.

"I made so much money, I figured I didn't need that much," he said. "And I didn't want to spend it all on me and my family."

Mr. Kleissner owns two homes, one in the San Francisco Bay Area and the other one in Big Sur, but no mansions -- "mansions are the wrong paradigm" -- and he and his wife drive only hybrid Toyotas, a Prius and a Highlander.

With sustainability "arguably being the biggest issue of the 21st century," Mr. Kleissner said, his family foundation has sought investments in for-profit social ventures that tilt at solutions. And for the past five or six years, Mr. Kleissner has been working full-time at social investments.

One of Mr. Kleissner's investments, for instance is in Pico Bonito, a for-profit spin-off of an ecological non-for-profit group that is reforesting land around Pico Bonito National Park in Honduras. The for-profit venture is creating various sustainable timber products for distribution and sale.

With some of these investments, Mr. Kleissner said, he is willing to make a trade-off on his financial return, as long as there is a demonstrable social or environmental return.

In the Pico Bonito case, said Mr. Kleissner, he is measuring the social return using a number of metrics, such as new jobs created in the two dozen or so villages affected by the project.

"The environmental return includes the elimination of large amounts of carbon dioxide emissions," said Mr. Kleissner, "and all the other environmental benefits associated with re-forestation like reintroduction of native forest species, establishing a permanent mechanism for plant, animal and ecosystem rejuvenation and preservation."