With 10 children and 39 grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Mary Ann Van Elslander of Grosse Pointe Shores knows how to change a diaper. Four hours each week, she holds babies, changes them and folds new supplies at St. John Hospital and Medical Center in Detroit.

Her giving to patient care doesn't stop there. It includes multimillion-dollar gifts to the hospital from the Van Elslander Family Foundation, which she and her husband, Art, began 15 years ago. Their most recent donation last month, like the rest undisclosed in its size, was the biggest philanthropic contribution in St. John's $30-million campaign to add 144 private rooms, consolidate radiology services and upgrade its heart program.

As the tax year ends, hospital development staffs are scurrying from meeting to meeting for what has become their busiest season for big donations. These big gifts benefit patients because they usually go toward construction, freeing up stretched hospital budgets for staff recruitment and patient and family programs.

For example, St. John's cancer program, the beneficiary of an earlier Van Elslander building grant, has added top cancer doctors and the latest in breast cancer detection technology. It has an extensive offering of courses and programs for patients and their families, from nutrition advice to yoga.

"Our whole concept as a cancer center is to integrate the healing of mind, body and spirit," Dr. Cheryl Wesen, director of breast care services, said Thursday.

In this season of giving, development staffers for health systems and medical schools are working overtime to line up donors who get tax breaks for gifts made by year's end.

"There are no vacations between Dec. 1 and Jan. 1," said Gary Rounding, the senior vice president for philanthropy for the Henry Ford Health System.

Rounding hasn't gone home early in December since 1974, with good reason.

That year, John Elsey, a real estate developer from southwest Detroit, called at 4:30 p.m. Dec. 31 to say that he'd give $1 million if Rounding could come to his office in 45 minutes. Elsey had called four other hospitals where no one answered, Rounding said. Rounding made it with a little time to spare.

A growing industry

Health care philanthropy is a $7-billion national industry, according to the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy. In a time of federal and state budget cutting, philanthropy "truly is our future; it's changing the way medical education is done," said Doug Czajkowski, executive director of external affairs for the Wayne State University School of Medicine.
With donations in the six and seven figures accounting for nearly one in every $5 donated to health care, jobs that fell to one person now are handled by an army of savvy professionals.

Golf outings and black-tie events are still important revenue generators, but they create smaller purses, compared with the treasure chests of money, stocks, homes and precious jewels from big donors.

The teams are there to assist, flying to visit out-of-state donors and arranging private meetings with big shooters - top doctors, other well-heeled donors and people like Wayne State University President Irvin Reid, who works a room like an Oscar contender on a Hollywood red carpet.

Reid is trying to raise $500 million - $115 million for Wayne State's medical school - by 2008. He was instrumental in helping to seal a recent $15-million gift from Nick Labedz of Capistranto Beach, Calif.

Apparently, there's more to come.

Labedz was the sole heir to the $60-million fortune of his longtime partner, Dr. Richard Mazurek, a 1961 WSU medical school graduate who amassed his wealth from real estate ventures in California.

"I could have given the money to UCLA," where Mazurek was on the faculty, "but those people at Wayne State made me feel right at home," he said.

Part of his gift came from the $5-million sale of their 9,000-square-foot Brentwood home in a tony neighborhood where actors Gregory Peck and Angela Lansbury have lived.

"When I told them, 'I think I can start with $10 million,' they had to pick themselves up off the floor and pry their eyeballs off the ceiling," he recalled. He plans another gift after he sells another home, he said.

Leaving a legacy

The Van Elslanders had no prior tie to St. John. But they wanted to have an impact at the hospital on Detroit's east side, Art Van Elslander said. Because "a lot of our employees are affected by cancer," they choose the cancer center as their first gift, said the founder of Art Van Furniture, Michigan's largest furniture retailer.

The family handles all charitable inquiries themselves, said Debra Van Elslander of Grosse Pointe Shores, a board member at St. John and eldest daughter in the Van Elslander clan.

"We'd like to give to everyone, but there are choices you have to make," Art Van Elslander said.

Having buildings bearing their names - the Van Elslander Cancer Center and the Van Elslander Pavilion - isn't as important to them as it might be to their grandchildren, Mary Ann Van Elslander said.

"It's a way of telling the grandchildren we have done something for this community," she said.

(SIDEBARS)

A LOOK AT WHO'S GIVING, AND FOR WHAT

Henry Ford Hospital

*$10 million from Doreen and the late David Hermelin of Bingham Farms to establish the Hermelin Brain Tumor Institute. David Hermelin, who died in 2000 from a brain tumor, was a real estate investor and co-owner of the Palace of Auburn Hills and the Pine Knob Entertainment Centers.
*$20 million over her lifetime from the late Josephine Ford of Grosse Pointe Farms to create the Josephine Ford Cancer Center. Auto pioneer Henry Ford was her grandfather.

*$20 million from Raj and Padma Vattikuti of Bloomfield Hills for the Vattikuti Urology Institute. Raj Vattikuti is cochairman and founder of Covansys, an information technology company based in Farmington Hills.

Beaumont Hospital

*$20 million from Peter and Florine Ministrelli of West Bloomfield to create the Ministrelli Women's Heart Institute, to provide cardiology imaging services and for urology research and education. A future gift from the family's estate will endow the programs with permanent funding sources. Peter Ministrelli made his money in highway construction and home development.

*$20 million from Raj and Padma Vattikuti of Bloomfield Hills to establish the Vattikuti Cancer Institute and to expand treatment, research, prevention and diagnosis of breast cancer.

University of Michigan Hospitals

*$44 million from Bill and Dee Brehm of McLean, Va., for research on type 1 (juvenile onset) diabetes. Bill Brehm was assistant secretary of the Army for Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon and is chairman emeritus of SRA International of Fairfax, Va. *$25 million, C.S. Mott Foundation in Flint for the creation of a new C.S. Mott Children's Hospital and Women's Hospital to replace the facility built 40 years ago with a $6.5-million gift from Michigan auto pioneer Charles Stewart Mott.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GIVE, TOO

The Troy law firm of Cox, Hodgman & Giarmarco's estate-planning division has some helpful tips and resources. You can find them at www.disinherit-irs.com

To help a hospital

Call hospital development offices about their fund-raising campaigns. For a list of phone numbers and Web sites, go to www.mha.org, for the Michigan Health & Hospital Association.

To help a medical school

Ongoing campaigns for medical schools in Michigan include those for:

*The University of Michigan Health System, www.medicineatmichigan.org/waysofgiving
*Wayne State University's School of Medicine, www.wsugifts.org
*The Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, http://humanmedicine.msu.edu/alumni_donors

CHART: How the funds are raised

Health care institutions raised about $7.1 billion for charity during the 2005 fiscal year, 16.3% more than in the previous fiscal year. Here is a breakdown of how the funds were raised.

Major gifts 17.8%

Annual giving 17.7%
Capital campaign 16.6%
Special events 12.9%
Grants 10.6%
Planned giving 10.4%
Endowment interest / income 5.2%
Memorial gifts 4.5%
Others 4.2%

Association for Healthcare Philanthropy

Contact PATRICIA ANSTETT at 313-222-5021 or panstett@freepress.com

ILLUSTRATION: Chart Detroit Free Press;Photo

CAPTION: Mary Ann Van Elslander's family has given millions to St. John Hospital and Medical Center in Detroit. She also gives her time. On Tuesday, she helped care for day-old Connor Sikorski of Roseville in the neonatal unit.

Former Michiganders Bill and Dee Brehm fund diabetes research.

Money from Doreen and David Hermelin created a tumor center.

GENEROUS DONORS

$20 Million for a women's heart institute at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, from Peter and Florine Ministrelli.

$20 Million for a urology institute at Henry Ford Hospital, from Raj and Padma Vattikuti.

CAPTIONWRITER: PATRICIA BECK / Detroit Free Press

MEMO: SIDEBARS ATTACHED

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