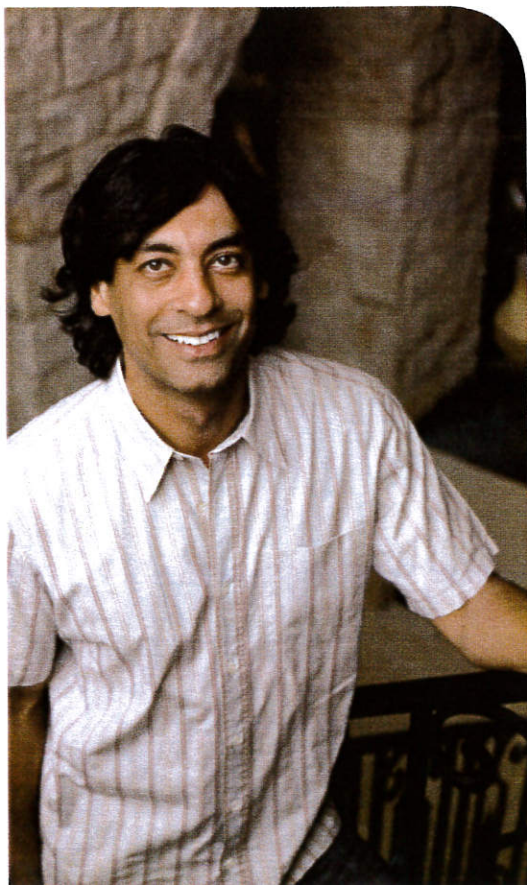


Nav Sooch has funded an orphanage in India, which will house 200 children and will open in 2008. The co-founder of Silicon Laboratories Inc. has made several trips to visit orphans in India (right) as part of his efforts with the Miracle Foundation.

# THE BUSINESS OF GIVING

What happens when you take a venture capital model and apply it to nonprofits? Austin business leader Nav Sooch helps nonprofit organizations launch and succeed through his foundation and strives to help those organizations change the lives of economically disadvantaged people.

BY TONYIA CONE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRETT BUCHANAN



After waiting tables at Angie's Mexican Restaurant for 10 years, Irene Casillas realized she needed a change. Pregnant with her second child, she knew she wanted to pursue higher education and a better career but didn't know how or when she could do it.

Casillas learned that Capital IDEA was the answer. Capital IDEA is an Austin-based nonprofit that helps working people move from poverty to financial independence through education. The organization could help her with funding for tuition, books and child care as well as counseling to help her balance the demands of family life and school. Through her enrollment in the program, she earned a certificate in licensed vocational nursing and landed a job at South Austin Hospital in 2004.

She also is graduating from Austin Community College at the end of the summer with an associate's degree in registered nursing. After graduation, Casillas aspires to work in the emergency room or intensive care unit at Brackenridge Hospital.

The youngest in a family of eight, Casillas will be the first to graduate from college.

"It changed not only my life," Casillas says. "It's a domino effect."

Because of her example, her children now expect to continue their education past high school, and her brother, sister and niece have graduated from, or are enrolled in degree, programs through Capital IDEA. Another niece is working toward her nursing degree as well.

The impact that Capital IDEA has had on the Casillas family is exactly what Nav Sooch, a co-founder of Austin-based Silicon Laboratories Inc., had in mind when he established the Sooch Foundation, a privately funded charitable foundation headquartered in Austin. Capital Idea is one of several Austin-area groups that have benefitted from the Foundation's support.

By funding educational activities and social services for people of all ages, the foundation seeks to make a positive, permanent change in the lives of





economically disadvantaged people. Sooch explains that he formed the foundation to facilitate an attempt at changing patterns.

"If you break that cycle once, it's broken," he says, explaining that he has always believed in the power of education. His parents were the first in their village in India to earn college degrees. He saw the difference it made in their lives, and attributes his own success to the education he received at the University of Michigan and Stanford University.

While the Sooch Foundation primarily funds Austin programs, it is increasingly funding organizations that support international concerns, such as the Austin-based Miracle Foundation, which works to improve the lives of orphans in India. Beginning this year, the Sooch Foundation increased its support of international programs from 20 percent of its total funding to 40 percent. Sooch says this is partly because the U.S. dollar goes much further in other countries.

"There are needs everywhere," Sooch says. "When you give abroad, if used wisely,

it can save lives versus bettering them. It's money well-spent."

Sooch's entrepreneurial background heavily influences his approach to running the foundation. He says there is a venture capital piece to the foundation's decision-making process. The board, made up of Sooch and the other Silicon Labs co-founders Jeff Scott and Dave Welland, does not spend time regretting decisions, Sooch explains.

When considering funding a program, Sooch says the foundation looks at passion for the issue in an organization's leadership, a clear mission and goals, and data to support an approach taken to solving a problem. Some projects are chosen because they fit the foundation's mission exactly. One good example of this is a library that the foundation built at the Knowledge Is Power Program Austin College Prep charter school, which provides a rigorous academic environment to underserved populations to prepare them for the country's best colleges and universities. Others are selected because they're unique, such as Asset, a group that

provides English language and technology training to the children of sex workers in India to help them avoid falling into that trade.

"We're looking for novel solutions to solving old problems," Sooch says. "Some are going to work. Some aren't."

Sooch explains that in cases like Asset, the foundation provides one-time funding, watches how the organization allocates its funding and evaluates whether to continue providing support.

The foundation's ongoing relationship with the Miracle Foundation is another example of its dedication to the causes it supports. At her first lunch with Sooch, Caroline Boudreaux, founder, president and executive director of the Miracle Foundation, requested funding for a doctor who works with orphans, who are considered "untouchables" in India. Sooch immediately agreed and since then, the Sooch Foundation, along with personal donations from Sooch, Scott and Welland totaling \$700,000, has paid for the Miracle





Nav Sooch meets with Mary Ellen Pietruszynski, the executive director of the Sooch Foundation, which he founded in 2003.

money for the project.


"They said they'd fund the whole thing. You could have knocked us over with a feather," Boudreaux says.

Mary Ellen Pietruszynski, the Sooch Foundation's executive director, called the Miracle Foundation about an hour later to confirm that the board members' answer was all that was needed to seal the deal.

Sooch's generous nature has shone through in his involvement with the Miracle Foundation beyond financial support, Boudreaux says. Sooch has also helped raise funding through his connections with other philanthropists and sponsors in Austin.

"His ambassadorship of the organization is phenomenal. When the Sooch Foundation gives you money, they've done their homework. It gives you credibility," Boudreaux says.

Sooch has also been directly involved with the children while visiting the Miracle Foundation's orphanages in India, and has taken friends with him on trips.

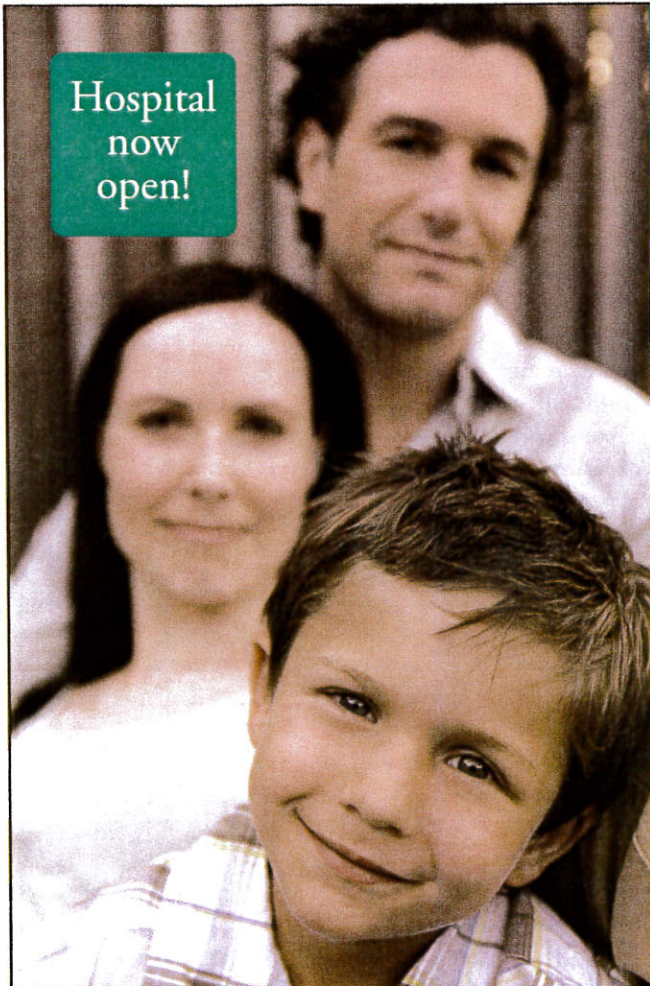
"He stayed there, ate what they ate, and played with the kids," Boudreaux says. "It's not just about money. The guy's great. He doesn't just give — he gives and gives." 

Foundation's fourth orphanage.

The Sooch Village, located in Ranchi, Jharkhand, will house 200 children and will open in March 2008. Not only will it serve as an ideal orphanage for Delhi and Calcutta, which each have lengthy adoption waiting lists, the location will also help the Miracle Foundation reach its goal to be the largest domestic adoption agency in India. When she approached the Sooch

Foundation to request funding for the orphanage, Boudreaux says she was surprised at the outcome as well as the board's approach to arriving at an answer.

Although the Miracle Foundation provided the board with blueprints, a project plan and a few years of success behind it, Boudreaux didn't think she stood a chance of receiving the foundation's support because she hadn't yet raised any



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