



What We Get We Give

AJ and Susie Balukoff, 2026 Idaho Philanthropy Hall of Fame



The story of **A.J. and Susie Balukoff** begins with a simple act of kindness.

Fresh out of high school, A.J. dreamed of attending college, but his family couldn't afford it. Then an anonymous donor stepped forward with a scholarship that paid for his first year. It was a gift from someone he would never meet, but it changed the course of his life. Decades later, A.J. still remembers the impact of that moment. He often reflects on

how one person's generosity opened a door that otherwise might have remained closed.

That experience planted a seed.

"If someone could do that for me," he has reflected, "I would like to someday be in a position to help someone else."

What followed was not a lifetime defined by wealth or recognition. It was a lifetime defined by gratitude.

When A.J. and Susie moved to Boise in 1982, they were looking for a place to raise their growing family. What they found was a community that embraced them. Teachers, neighbors, volunteers, coaches, nonprofit leaders, and community members invested in opportunities for their eight children and welcomed them into a city that still felt like a small town.

For Susie, that experience shaped the family's approach to philanthropy.

"Immediately you want to go help," she recalled. "You want to give back because they're giving to you, and to set an example for our children."

And so they did.

A.J. was a certified public accountant building a practice in a new community. He had expertise to offer and time to spare. Local nonprofits needed volunteers who understood budgets, financial statements, and governance. A.J. raised his hand. What started as a practical way to serve became a lifelong commitment to helping organizations grow stronger and more effective.



Over the next four decades, the Balukoffs became deeply woven into the fabric of Idaho's nonprofit community.

A.J. devoted his financial expertise, leadership, and steady consensus-building style to organizations throughout the state. He helped guide educational institutions, healthcare organizations, arts groups, libraries, and charitable organizations. His service included leadership roles with the Boise School District, Boise State University Foundation, St. Luke's, Ballet Idaho, the Boise Public Library, and many others.

At St. Luke's, A.J. became one of the organization's strongest champions for quality and patient safety. His leadership helped advance initiatives focused on improving healthcare outcomes and reducing preventable harm to patients throughout the region.

Susie brought the same spirit of service wherever she chose to invest her time and energy.

Her passion for children, education, animals, the arts, and community growth helped shape organizations across Idaho. She played a pivotal role in the evolution of Zoo Boise, where colleagues remember her willingness to do whatever was needed, whether that meant board leadership, fundraising, offering guidance, or showing up ready to work alongside volunteers. As former Zoo Director **Steve Burns** recalled, Susie never simply supported a cause. She put her whole heart into it.

Together, they supported causes that reflected their deepest values: education, healthcare, arts and culture, and community enrichment. Their generosity has touched Boise State University, Brigham Young University, Idaho State University, St. Luke's, Zoo Boise, the Boise Philharmonic, Boise Opera, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, and countless other organizations. Many of their gifts were made quietly, without public recognition.

The breadth of their philanthropy is impressive.

The motivation behind it is even more remarkable.

Ask the Balukoffs about philanthropy, and they will not talk first about money.

They talk about community.

They talk about helping where help is needed.

They talk about using whatever skills, talents, resources, or time a person has been given.

They believe that everyone has something to contribute.



A.J. often emphasizes that philanthropy is not measured by the size of a gift, but by the willingness to give. He points to the idea that even the smallest contribution can make an outsized difference when it comes from the heart.

Susie shares a similar conviction. She believes some of the most valuable contributions come from people who quietly observe, listen, learn, and then step forward with an idea, a talent, or a helping hand. She is quick to remind others that every person has something meaningful to offer.

That belief has become one of the Balukoffs' greatest legacies.

Beyond every board they have served, every scholarship they have funded, every campaign they have supported, and every organization they have strengthened, they have demonstrated a powerful truth: philanthropy belongs to everyone.

Their lives serve as a reminder that communities are built person by person, gift by gift, and act by act.

One anonymous scholarship helped a young man attend college.

That young man never forgot.

And over a lifetime, that single act of generosity multiplied into countless others, creating opportunities for students, families, patients, artists, and neighbors throughout Idaho.

The Idaho Philanthropy Hall of Fame honors individuals whose generosity changes communities.

The story of A.J. and Susie Balukoff reminds us why.

Not because of what they accumulated.

But because of what they gave away.