

## Stewards of America's Stadium: Local Leaders Champion Rose Bowl's Future

By Camila Castellanos  
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*The Rose Bowl Legacy Foundation's \$80 million capital campaign has been grounded by Bob Kohorst (from left) and Mickey Segal, with Dedan Brozino, Legacy Foundation's president and the Rose Bowl's chief development officer.*

In the shadows of the San Gabriel Mountains, where the Rose Bowl has presided over a century of sporting glory, two men have emerged as the stadium's most ardent benefactors to help secure the future of what many consider America's most storied athletic venue.

Mickey Segal and Bob Kohorst, pillars of Pasadena's philanthropic community, represent the vanguard of the Rose Bowl Legacy Foundation's ambitious \$80 million, multi-phase capital campaign — an endeavor that exemplifies how private philanthropy can preserve public treasures for future generations. Together, they embody a philosophy of civic stewardship that recognizes the Rose Bowl not merely as a sports facility, but as a cultural touchstone that has woven itself into the fabric of American consciousness.

Segal, a cofounder and managing partner of NKSFB LLC — the nation's largest business management firm — approaches philanthropy with the methodical precision that has defined his four-decade career in financial stewardship. His portfolio of charitable endeavors reads like a compendium of Southern California's significant institutions: USC Arcadia Hospital, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the American Cancer Society, and his alma mater, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

According to Dedan Brozino, the Legacy Foundation's president and the Rose Bowl's chief development officer, Segal's influence extends far beyond financial contributions.

"Mickey Segal's generosity goes far beyond his chairmanship of the Legacy Board of Directors or writing a check," Brozino said. "He has a remarkable ability to bring people along with him — whether that's through his personal passion for the Rose Bowl Stadium, his deep relationships in the community, or the example he sets by giving at the highest level."

Segal reflected on his efforts for the Rose Bowl with characteristic directness, quipping "Some people's hobbies are golf; my hobby is raising money."

His track record substantiates this claim — over the past two decades, he has orchestrated the procurement of about \$320 million for various causes, including a \$150 million campaign for Cal Poly Pomona and a \$27 million hospital tower initiative.

Brozino emphasizes that Segal's true gift lies in inspiration rather than mere solicitation:

"Fundraising is often thought of as asking for support, but Mickey demonstrates that the true gift lies in inspiring others to believe in a cause. He listens, he connects, and he helps people see how their support can make a tangible difference."

The Pasadena native's connection to the Rose Bowl runs deeper than financial calculus. As a three-time participant in the storied Turkey Tussle — the annual Thanksgiving rivalry between Pasadena and Muir high schools played on the hallowed turf — Segal carries the visceral memory of competing where legends once stood.

"That experience kind of lives with you," he explains. "If you talk to players who've competed in the Rose Bowl, it's with you all your life."

His approach to major gift solicitation reflects a nuanced understanding of donor psychology. Seven-figure contributions, he notes, are "like finding a needle in a haystack," often coming from unexpected sources rather than obvious prospects. This counterintuitive wisdom has informed his strategy as board chairman since 2015, a tenure that has coincided with the foundation's most productive fundraising period.



*Bob Kohorst and Mickey Segal are helping to lead the Rose Bowl Legacy Foundation's capital campaign.*

## **A DIPLOMAT'S PERSPECTIVE**

Kohorst brings a distinctly different trajectory to the foundation's leadership. The former U.S. Ambassador to Croatia — a position he describes as "the best job in the whole world" — exemplifies the intersection of public service and private philanthropy that characterizes many of the venue's most committed supporters.

His diplomatic service, managing 225 employees for three years at the embassy post, cultivated leadership skills that translate seamlessly to philanthropic endeavors. During his tenure in Zagreb, Kohorst achieved resolution on three of five long-standing bilateral issues that had remained dormant for nearly three decades — a testament to his results-oriented approach.

"The Rose Bowl Stadium is an important point of pride and an economic impact catalyst for Pasadena, the San Gabriel Valley and the Southern California region," Kohorst said.

His connection to the venue began through a passion for Michigan football (he's a University of Michigan alumnus, and his wife, Shelley, is from Michigan) and deepened during years of residence on Linda Vista, directly adjacent to the stadium. Rather than joining neighborhood opposition to stadium events, Kohorst embraced the positive energy and economic vitality they brought to the community.

Brozino characterizes Kohorst's leadership style as emblematic of quiet but transformative influence. "What I've observed about Bob Kohorst is the many years of trusted respect that he's earned as a publicly respected thought leader," Brozino noted. "His gift shows that you don't need to be front and center to make a transformative difference. He believes in the mission, he supports it wholeheartedly, and that kind of steady, thoughtful commitment is every bit as inspiring as the more visible forms of leadership."

One evocative memory from Kohorst's time as a Linda Vista resident illustrates the venue's capacity to create community cohesion. During Super Bowl XXVII in 1993, he hosted a gathering that included NFL legends Lynn Swann and O.J. Simpson. As game time approached, the entire party — celebrities and neighbors alike — walked together down the hill to the stadium, gradually merging with the massive crowd of attendees.

"All of us were melding with thousands of people," Kohorst recalled, embracing the memory of joining the NFL Hall of Fame players to walk somewhat anonymously among fans, stopping to take photos when they were recognized.

The experience helped Kohorst encapsulate the spirit that makes the Rose Bowl a community asset rather than merely an entertainment destination.

Brozino emphasized that such memories represent the foundation's broader mission.

"In my 10 years with the Rose Bowl Legacy Foundation, I've never heard the same story twice. This place is multi-generational and has sparked intense, one-of-a-kind memories for millions around the world and thousands in this treasured community," he said.

The foundation's success under their leadership reflects more than fundraising acumen. Since the Legacy Foundation's start in 2010, the volunteer board has stimulated over \$70 million in gross private contributions, pledges, planned giving and government awards to benefit the preservation, protection and enhancement of America's Stadium. These figures represent a remarkable achievement for an institution that, as foundation officials acknowledge, operates outside traditional philanthropic categories.

"This isn't a church. This isn't a hospital. This isn't somebody's alma mater," Brozino said. "But it's worshipped by a lot of people emotionally."

The challenge of fundraising for a sports venue presents unique obstacles. Unlike universities or medical institutions with natural constituencies, the Rose Bowl must cultivate donor affinity through shared cultural experiences and community pride. The venue's global recognition — what Segal describes as the "Keith Jackson Common America Stadium" phenomenon — provides a foundation, but converting recognition into financial commitment requires sophisticated relationship management.

The foundation's current campaign assumes heightened urgency as Los Angeles prepares to host the 2028 Olympics, with the Rose Bowl serving as a venue for both preliminary rounds and medal competitions. This global showcase presents both opportunity and obligation — the chance to demonstrate American sporting excellence alongside the imperative to ensure the century-old facility meets contemporary standards.

The timing presents fundraising complexities. Soliciting contributions in 2025-2026 for projects not scheduled until 2029 requires donors to embrace delayed gratification, a proposition that tests even the most committed philanthropists' patience, Segal noted.

## **PHILOSOPHY OF GIVING**

Both men articulate giving philosophies that transcend tax strategy or social positioning. Segal described a personal observation spanning three decades: increased charitable giving has consistently coincided with enhanced personal prosperity, creating what he terms a cycle of generosity and abundance.

"Since 1990, the more I give, the more I seem to get," he said, noting that his family has donated roughly 21% of gross income over recent years — a level of commitment that places them among the nation's most generous philanthropists.

Kohorst, meanwhile, emphasizes timing and relationship-building in major gift cultivation. His own substantial contribution — the campaign's lead private donation — emerged from what he described as fortuitous convergence: a compelling case presented at a moment of financial capacity, delivered by leadership he trusted.

"Some of it is about timing. They asked at the right time, or when you're feeling flush, so you maybe give more than you would have... also, [they] laid out a reasonable plan and it struck me as something good," he said.

## **AMERICA'S STADIUM**

The Rose Bowl's unique position in American sports culture underpins the foundation's fundraising narrative. Unlike corporate-sponsored venues with rotating naming rights, the Rose Bowl has maintained its identity across generations, becoming synonymous with college football excellence and Olympic tradition.

This institutional continuity creates what development professionals term "emotional infrastructure" — the intangible connections that motivate extraordinary giving. When Segal mentions the venue by name in international contexts, recognition is immediate and invariably positive, a testament to brand equity built over more than a century.

The foundation's success in attracting support from beyond Pasadena's borders reflects this national resonance. Contributors include alumni from universities that have competed in Rose Bowl games, former players whose careers were defined by New Year's Day performances, and philanthropists who recognize the venue's role in American sporting heritage.

## **LEGACY AND CONTINUITY**

Though Kohorst is retired from his real estate investment business ("depending on who you ask," he winked), and Segal reflects on the enormous management company he built from the ground up, questions of institutional memory become paramount. Segal's 15-year tenure as the Legacy Foundation's board chairman has provided stability through multiple leadership transitions, while Kohorst's diplomatic experience offers strategic perspective on navigating complex stakeholder relationships.



Their commitment extends beyond current campaigns to fundamental questions of institutional preservation. The Rose Bowl's status as a National Historic Landmark creates both protection and obligation, ensuring the venue's character while enabling necessary modernization.

“When you’re 100-plus years old, you might have a little bit of a bones problem, and we’ve got to sure that these bones aren’t a problem. That keeps me active — the preservation of this amazing facility for a long, long time,” Segal said. “We’ve been blessed to get what this country calls America’s Stadium. And we in Pasadena have an obligation to maintain it. My driving force is to make sure my kids, grandkids, and all those who come next will have this tremendous landmark.”

The foundation's model demonstrates how civic philanthropic organizations can bridge public and private interests. By maintaining independence from municipal governance while supporting a city-owned asset, the Legacy Foundation navigates the complexities inherent in public-private partnerships.



*Bob Kohorst and Mickey Segal*

## **MEASURE OF SUCCESS**

Both philanthropists acknowledge that Rose Bowl giving represents a unique category within their charitable portfolios. Unlike donations to alma maters or medical institutions with clear beneficiaries, stadium philanthropy serves broader community interests while preserving shared cultural assets.

"I don't think the Rose Bowl should be your soul or necessarily even your largest source for donation," Kohorst noted, mirroring how he might counsel prospective donors. "But it is a source of pride for the community, and by helping the Rose Bowl be a better facility, we create more pride in our community."

His measured perspective reflects sophisticated donor thinking and recognizes that effective philanthropy can include portfolio diversification, while acknowledging that certain institutions merit support for their symbolic and economic contributions to community vitality.

As the Rose Bowl approaches its 104th year and prepares for Olympic competition, the foundation's work continues. The venue that has hosted three Olympic Games, five Super Bowls, megastar concerts and countless memories will depend on continued philanthropic investment to maintain its position as America's Stadium.

For Segal and Kohorst, the responsibility represents both privilege and obligation — the chance to ensure that future generations inherit the same sense of wonder they experienced within the stadium's storied walls.