



HONORING DIVERSITY
Inti Raymi Fund founder David McGrain, or Chimu as he is known, has shifted his focus from building his own success to helping others find their own voice in the world.

Adrenaline Philanthropy

David McGrain has found his passion in traveling around the globe to help the world's Indigenous Peoples find dignity through self-determination.

WRITTEN BY **JOHN ETTORRE** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JEFF WILSON**

David McGrain — or Chimu, as his friends call him — was passing through U.S. Customs in the Miami airport when a couple of agents stopped him. They were curious about the \$25,000 in cash he was carrying in his backpack.

The tense moment might have unfolded differently, if it weren't for his quick-thinking salesmanship. The Texas real estate veteran and budding philanthropist calmly pulled out his laptop, which contained hundreds of photos of his world travels. He proceeded to stage an impromptu clinic about his Inti Raymi Fund (intiraymifund.org), a nonprofit that delivers cash to indigenous villagers in remote places around the world for transformative community projects.

Welcome to Chimu's world.

One day he's in the Arctic region, helping a Norwegian tribe that follows migrating reindeer herds, and another day he's rubbing elbows with armed militias in war-torn Somalia — all in the service of helping indigenous people chart their own futures.

You may know these people, seemingly out of step with the march of progress, from *National Geographic* documentaries or news coverage of anthropologists working to preserve native customs of isolated tribes. McGrain worries that without meaningful support, "in 50 to 100 years, indigenous people will be extinct. They will have all been assimilated into the big cities."

Finding purpose in simplicity

McGrain's philanthropic odyssey began with a series of experiences that started as he approached his 50th birthday.

McGrain started his career at commercial real estate giant Trammell Crow, where he became a leading performer. He then branched out on his own, buying and renovating apartment complexes. But as his business prospered, his personal life suffered, and he was losing interest in his work. "My income was going up and up, and you'd think I'd be happy," he says. "But I wasn't. My personal life was getting worse. And there was a message there, but I had to hit rock bottom to see it — there's just zero correlation between money and happiness."

Always a thrill-seeker, the former weightlifting champion and mountain climber began traveling to remote spots, visiting more than 50 countries to date. On his first trip, he fell in love with the culture of Peru. "You're in this small village, where they're weaving and making ceramics, and it's like taking art class all day long. And you see how really happy they are. There's a beauty and simplicity to that."

When he got home, he began taking

art classes and was drawn to pre-Columbian art, the cultural expression of native peoples before their conquest by Columbus and other European explorers. As a form of respect, he began covering his body in tattoos depicting that art. Somewhere along the way, he received the nickname Chimu, the name of a highly advanced Peruvian tribe conquered by the Incas in the 15th century.

He had an epiphany as he continued to travel. "This is my special purpose in life," he realized. "That's why I was blessed with this income. I've always had this very strong passion for the underdog. And now I have some money. Not a great fortune, but enough to do some good. So I can put the two together and make some music." Still, it took him almost a year of additional travel before he could figure out precisely what to do. "I realized I had no idea," he says. So he decided to ask the villagers what they wanted and, in 2011, Inti Raymi was born.

Embracing the world

McGrain rests his grant-making philosophy on two touchstones — the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and his own



(Clockwise from left) Among Chimu's projects: Promoting entrepreneurship in the village of Aw-Barkatle in Somalia; supporting women in the jungle community of San Francisco, Peru, near the city of Pucallpa; visiting Masai village elders in Tanzania.

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fervent belief that far too much traditional international aid never reaches the intended audience.

“I would guess that about 10 percent of international aid makes it to the people on the ground who need it,” McGrain says. “That’s why we deal in cash. I’m a control freak. I deliver the money. When I lay out the money, I explain to them: ‘The minute I walk away from this table, this is not my money. This is your children’s future. This is everyone’s money. And if anybody steals the money, they’re not stealing it from me, because I’ve already gifted it away.’ And those people get it.” He complies with all U.S. laws, but chooses not to work through governments or tribal elders as intermediaries. “I ask for forgiveness rather than permission,” he says.

He finds some project ideas by attending U.N. conferences. Others, he just stumbles upon during his travels.

“I happened to be traveling from Istanbul to Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, and I was on a 12-hour flight,” he recalls, “and I started talking to a Spanish documentary filmmaker. He was in Tanzania and Kenya, documenting the plight of human albinos, whose limbs are amputated by certain religious sects that hunt them down.” This conversation may one day lead to a project.

“By the end of 2014, we will have completed 30 projects in 30 countries. That’s 15 percent of the world right there.” At his projected rate of 10 projects per year, it will take him another 17 years to reach his goal — completing a project in all of the world’s approximately 200 countries — although he knows he’ll face challenges in places like North Korea and Cuba.

Ultimately, McGrain is driven by a gut feeling that we’re all related. DNA tests on human remains around the

globe suggest common descent from Ethiopia. “So whether you’re white or black, Shia or Sunni, we’re all brothers,” he says. “Knowledge can go a long way to reducing hatred and discrimination. That’s what I’m hoping.” C

► **JOHN ETTORRE**'s work has appeared in *The New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. He lives in Cleveland. **JEFF WILSON**'s photographs are included in the permanent collection of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

➔ A strong team behind him

David McGrain's Wells Fargo relationship team, led by Senior Private Banker Brian Biggs, helps him keep his financial house in order so that he can concentrate his efforts on Inti Raymi. Read more at wfconversations.com/chimu.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Chimu describes his mission and his passion at wfconversations.com/intiraymi

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