Artist of the Month
Broadmoor resident,
Paul Mullally
celebrates the
unveiling of his
portrait of Pope
Francis in Rome!
Madison Park residents Paul Suzman and Melissa West agree that you don’t need a big team to have a massive impact in the world. “We’re small but mighty” both said in reference to the Seattle-based organization, VillageReach.

Rooted in the “intersection of public health, technology and private sector,” and with a mission to “save lives and improve health by increasing access to quality healthcare for the most underserved communities,” VillageReach has impacted over 16 million people in several countries since its founding in 2000.

VillageReach focuses on “last mile” solutions for healthcare delivery. The term refers to the final push of delivery that oftentimes is the most difficult due to limited resources and infrastructure constraints. Rather than implementing aid through direct giving, VillageReach partners with other capable organizations and ministries of health to tackle issues at a systemic level. Their goal in every location is to develop unique solutions that are efficient, effective and overall sustainable to the particular community receiving the intervention.

Suzman, who is an original founding board member of Village Reach said, “We look at the situation on the ground first; we try to understand the political situation, understand the cultural situation, and then can figure out what is the best solution that might work in that particular situation. We engage the people and the talent on the ground to develop the solutions that are most likely to succeed.” These solutions take on everything from supply chains for vaccine delivery to simply providing resources to communities that will educate and inform their healthcare decisions.

A great example of this process is a community program in Malawi called Health Center by Phone – locally referred to as Chipatala chapha Foni, or CCFF. “CCFF” is a toll-free health hotline [and digital message service] that allows people in remote communities to seek healthcare information and advice from the call center’s
trained staff.” CCPF originated as a hotline for pregnant women and has since evolved to cover general health concerns like HIV, nutrition and cancer. By linking rural communities to qualified individuals over the phone, CCPF cuts out the long distances often traveled by people to seek care and gives them the autonomy to be more regularly proactive about their health. CCPF is a national service made possible by their Malawian mobile partner Airtel, the Malawi Ministry of Health and other partners. “The service is currently accessible to more than 5 million people. When national scale-up is complete in 2018, CCPF will be the first, government-run national health hotline in Africa.”

West, VR’s Director of Advocacy and Communications, said that she is continually inspired “by the people who work at VillageReach and the people that we serve. We have a very diverse organization and it’s great to work across the globe,” she said. “I also love being able to learn every day how we can better improve health systems.”

VillageReach has also seen immense growth to their team and outreach in a short period of time. Sitting President Emily Bancroft said, “In the last two years we’ve gone from having 80 staff globally to 160, and going from staff in three locations to staff in nine locations.”

With that growth comes much good, but also its share of complexities. West said that forming local partnerships with foundations, corporations and even individual donors are great ways to not only spread awareness for VillageReach, but also enable their ability to pursue last mile solutions through effective growth. “One of the main ways we get support through the community is identifying potential partners. Many types of partners are required to tackle health system improvements in sub-Saharan Africa. There’s no right or wrong way to get involved; we’d love to have a conversation with anyone who expresses interest in what we do.”