

Creativity is a win-win for philanthropy, businesses

BY GREG HEYMAN | CONTRIBUTOR

The success of the Literacy Council's Rally for Reading was not only more than anticipated, it achieved its goals through support from area businesses that didn't involve monetary contributions.

Instead, they helped with the first fundraiser for the Junior Board in more creative ways – Pale Eddie's provided a patio area, while Jim 'N Nick's Bar B Que donated barbecue and a nacho bar, and Salon U contributed styling coupons.

The only cost was a photographer, which Beth Wilder, council president and executive director, said was minimal.

"A number of businesses in our area who were generous when called upon to support the Rally for Reading played a significant role in the success of our junior board's first fundraiser," Wilder said. "The junior board pulled together the event with virtually no expense allowing them to raise more money to support our services."

A business helping charitable organizations or nonprofits by offering free services or products is hardly a new idea, but it highlights the importance of partnerships with nonprofits. More importantly, it's a way to help during uncertain economic times with efforts that don't always involve money.

Assuring the public is aware of needs by different groups is not only a way a business can be more creative, it fits in with U.S. Administrative Law Judge Debra Goldstein's personal philosophy

"In my opinion, it's about connecting dots and partnerships," Goldstein said. "I've always believed in bringing people together and making people aware of causes and organizations. I've never been one with my own personal deep pocket, plus I have a job that doesn't allow me to solicit."

But Goldstein was able to help by donating a portion of in-store and online sales made at Little Professor Book Center of her murder mystery "Maze in Blue." That was followed by her also donating a portion of the book's sales at Little Professor to the YWCA's domestic violence programs, along with a book signing sponsored by the Zonta Club.

And while donating profits and items such as food is important, Lisa Borden,



The Literacy Council's junior board members (L-R) Andrew Austin, Landon Howell and Chelsea Howell at a recent Rally for Reading fundraiser at Pale Eddie's Pour House.

pro bono shareholder with Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz PC, said she believes offering professional services also helps.

That conviction is behind free legal work the firm provides nonprofits.

"A nonprofit organization has all the same kind of legal needs that any other company has, so we provide those kinds of services," Borden said.

She added that the Baker Donelson Non-Profit Institute involves attorneys talking to board members of nonprofits about their obligations as a board member. It also advises on their legal responsibilities, in addition to assuring directors are protected and looking at charters and bylaws to make sure they are current and if revisions or additions are needed.

But Borden said law firms offering professional services aren't limited to law firms, citing accountants as individuals who can provide bookkeeping services.

"There's just so many things that professional service businesses can do," she said.

Allowing clients to help with giving is also a way businesses can contribute.

Last year, Christian & Small LLP created a website ahead of the holiday season and allowed clients to vote on the three nonprofits they would support that year in lieu of traditional gifts sent by the firm. Money was then given, in their clients' names, to the charities according to votes.

Debbie Smith, Christian & Small's man-

aging partner, said the result was the firm was able to reach 53 students for Teach for America, two families of four were sent to Disney World as part of Make-A-Wish, and 17,500 meals were provided through Feeding America.

"We felt like we had a huge impact and we got rave reviews from our clients," Smith said. "We made a huge difference. The money we would have spent sending something to clients, they were actually able to contribute and make a difference in the community."

Smith added that the same initiative is planned this year.

There will always be a need, and Goldstein thinks companies and individuals should regularly be looking for creative ways to help others, regardless of the economic climate.

"I think even in a good economy, one needs to think outside the box to come up with creative ways to bring partnerships to the table," she said. "I don't think just asking for dollars in today's world is the answer. You've got to make people aware of what the needs are and what can be accomplished.

"My little efforts may not have made a fortune for these organizations, but every time I give a speech and every time I donate to one of the organizations, it helps a little and somebody else wakes up and does a little more and our little efforts can add up," Goldstein said.

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