

Softening Economy Doesn't Harden Hearts

By Steven Pearlstein
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There's a temptation to gauge the generosity of a community by the number of million-dollar donations made to the local symphony or university, or the number of fundraising records set by the annual cancer ball or school auction. And until recently, thanks to a booming economy and real estate market, the Washington region has done pretty well by that standard.

But the real test of community spirit comes at times like these, when economies begin to soften and individuals and companies have to make tough choices about how to allocate their attention and their money. The challenge is particularly acute for smaller, less-well-known nonprofit organizations that provide direct services to those most in need but don't have large fundraising staffs or the reputations and social cache of larger cultural and educational institutions.

For the most part, Washington continues to meet that challenge -- or so it seems from submissions I have received from local nonprofit organizations about extraordinary corporate philanthropy. Even as deals come unwound and share prices tumble, the commitment of business leaders remains remarkably strong, particularly in the area of children and families.

In that regard, one of the more innovative local philanthropic initiatives comes from the foundation set up by Sidney Harman, executive chairman of audio equipment maker *Harman International Industries*, which keeps a small corporate headquarters in the District. It's called the Catalogue for Philanthropy, which is in its fifth year of operation and has funneled \$4 million in contributions to more than 300 small local nonprofit organizations that it has identified as the most effective in the region.

The handsome catalogues listing this year's featured programs were mailed to 30,000 potential donors, along with 100,000 posters designed to get donors to the catalogue's website (<http://catalogueforphilanthropy-dc.org>). For the first time, a few companies -- *Chevy Chase Bank, CGI, Friedman, Billings, Ramsey Group*-- have distributed the catalogue to their employees.

For some of the nonprofit organizations profiled in the catalogue, it's been a transformative experience, giving them access to a base of donors that they would not otherwise have been able to tap. And for donors who don't have time to sift through all the competing solicitations, the due diligence done by the 55 professional reviewers offers the assurance that contributions will go to agencies that are well-run and effective. It's all the brainchild of Harman's daughter, Barbara, a retired English professor who's won support for the catalogue from a number of other family foundations.

These days, there is no higher priority than the soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with their families back home. A number of local companies have taken up that cause.

Under the leadership of executive Mike Rand, a Vietnam veteran, *Adventist HealthCare* has helped to launch Heroes at Home, which assists low-income veterans with home repairs and modifications.

For the third year, the management consultants and financial advisers at *MorganFranklin* organized a golf tournament and auction that raised \$100,000 for the Wounded Warrior Project that assists severely injured soldiers.

The lobbyists at *Akin Gump* used their political juice to get a \$500,000 Pentagon contract for Our Military Kids, which provides support for the children of deployed and severely injured National Guard and Reserve personnel.

The office movers of *Kane Co.* donated more than 120 boxes of food and other items that were delivered to troops in Iraq just in time for the holidays.

Under the direction of partner Tim McClain, a former general counsel of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the law firm of *Womble Carlyle* launched When Duty Calls, which assists veterans with their disability claims.

At the request of the USO, *Turner Construction* corralled many of its subcontractors to build special airport lounges at Dulles and National airports for the use of returning service members and their families.

Particularly heartwarming is the contribution of Ann Hand, a jeweler in the District, who on Valentine's Day and then again at Christmas has walked the wards at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Bethesda Naval Medical Center, offering wounded soldiers and Marines their choice of a free piece of jewelry for the special person in their lives. Ann says the favorite is a bracelet etched with a quotation from Abraham Lincoln: "All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

This has been a turnaround year for the chronically under-managed and under-performing D.C. public schools. Much of the behind-the-scenes political and financial support for Mayor Adrian M. Fenty's effort has come from the corporate heavy-hitters at the *Federal City Council*. *PNC Bank*, *J.E. Roberts Companies* and *Ferris, Baker Watts* were among the most active, providing more than \$400,000 for the consulting studies that provided the blueprint for much of structural reorganization that has just been launched by the new superintendent.

And there was *Fannie Mae*, which was prompted by a Post article on the dismal conditions of the athletic facilities at D.C. schools to put up \$4 million for a major renovation at Ballou High School. The project included a new field, bleachers, press box, lighting bathroom and concession stands for the homecoming game against the Anacostia Indians in October.

It was much the same with *Feld Entertainment* (a.k.a. *Ringling Bros.* circus), which responded generously when it learned of funding problems at the District's performing arts program at Duke Ellington School. In addition to \$100,000 worth of used theater equipment, Feld also provided \$100,000 in cash for the theater tech department.

Ellington's visual arts program also gets regular support from the Dickstein Shapiro law firm, which runs an annual holiday greeting card competition for art students.

The staff of the World Bank teamed up with *Microsoft*, Howard University, *Paradigm Service Group* and Catholic University to design, build and equip resource centers in the four D.C. high schools east of the Anacostia River. The centers now provide a range of educational and social services.

On two afternoons this summer, nearly 300 volunteers from *Vornado* and the member firms of the *Greater Washington Board of Trade* cleaned and painted the West End's Francis Junior High School.

IBM donated \$60,000 worth of computers loaded with educational software to pre-K programs in 25 District schools. *Verizon* got in the act with a grant to Turning the Page, which runs an innovative in-school program that uses cameras and photography as a way of teaching reading and writing.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the thousands of hours of mentoring, training and support services contributed by *Atlantic Media* and its employees to provide life skills and college preparation for District high school students under the auspices of Urban Alliance.

One of the great mysteries is why Washington-area building contractors have to look to Pennsylvania and West Virginia for skilled workers when there are so many unemployed young men close at hand. Several years ago, *Shapiro & Duncan*, a mechanical systems contractor in Rockville, decided to do something about it. Working with Montgomery County schools, community colleges and other contractors, they arranged for internships and apprenticeships that have led dozens of students to good high-paying jobs.

With accounting scandals and a mortgage crisis to deal with, it's been a busy and challenging year for *Fannie Mae* and *Freddie Mac*-- but not so busy or challenging that they have let up on their efforts on behalf of the homeless in the Washington region. Freddie's Hoops for the Homeless event at the Verizon Center raised \$900,000 for six homeless nonprofit organizations this year. In its 25th year, Fannie Mae's Help the Homeless Walkathon -- including a 30,000-person walk on the Mall and hundreds of mini-walks schools across the region -- raised several million dollars for 175 homeless shelters and transitional housing programs in the area.

Just as impressive, however, were the efforts of *Weschler's Auctioneers and Appraisers* and developer *PN Hoffman* on behalf of the Dinner Program for Homeless Women that's been serving the Penn Quarter area since 1979. Weschler sisters Margaret and Virginia took it upon themselves to organize a fundraising dinner and auction for the program that raised \$20,000 for the program. Monty Hoffman and his colleagues not only spent countless hours in the agency's

kitchen, but put the arm on suppliers and contractors to participate in a golf-tournament at Whiskey Creek that raised \$50,000, including a \$10,000 cash donation from Hoffman.

This month, after The Post reported that cupboards at local food banks were getting bare, the employees of local *Whole Foods Markets* sprung into action, with each store sending \$1,000 to a nearby food bank. That's on top of the regular weekly donations of meat, fruits, vegetables, milk and other perishables to the food banks and shelters that are hard-wired into the Whole Foods operations.

Giant and *Safeway*, of course, have long had similar programs. But the folks at the *Falls Church Community Service Council* are particularly appreciative to the *Trader Joe's* on Leesburg Pike for providing a reliable supply of perishables for its food pantry.

The *Capital Area Food Bank*, meanwhile, is thrilled with the \$1 million worth of solar panels donated by *BP Solar* in Frederick, that will reduce its carbon footprint and shave 20 percent off its electric bills.

Amid all the gentrification going on in Adams Morgan, the *Jubilee Housing* project has been trying to develop five buildings for affordable rental housing. Two are complete. None of it would have been possible without the financing, volunteer time and more than \$100,000 in grants from the bankers at *PNC*.

Meanwhile, in another transitional neighborhood, along the U Street corridor, eight local retailers -- *Nana*, *Caramel*, *GoodWood*, *RCKNDY*, *Moojoo Ken*, *Junction*, *Simply Home* and *Wild Women Wear Red*-- recently donated 10 percent of their sales on a special holiday shopping night to benefit the *Patricia M. Sitar Center for the Arts*, which provides after school, weekend and summer programs for at-risk kids.

In the same spirit, the *El Golfo* restaurant in Silver Spring has regularly designated special nights when 25 percent of each tab is donated to the PTA at one of the nearby public schools.

The *National Center for Children and Families* in Bethesda has been providing services to children in need since 1915, thanks to many generous donors. But none has been more reliable than *Smokey Glen Farm*, which has hosted the kids, volunteers and supporters each year for a day-long barbecue at its company picnic venue in Gaithersburg.

Across the river, *Northern Virginia Family Service* says it couldn't do all the good it does without the cash (\$25,000 a year or more), in-kind support and volunteer hours provided by the consultants at *Booz Allen Hamilton* and the real estate whizzes at *Peterson Co.*

Booz and Peterson are the Zeligs of corporate philanthropy in Northern Virginia -- every time you turn around, they're there. But special note should be taken of the partnership Booz has with the *ALS Association* (which fights Lou Gehrig's disease) and Peterson's relentless fundraising for *Inova Health System's Life with Cancer* program in Arlington.

There isn't a newspaper column long enough to list all the longer-term partnerships that exist between local companies and local nonprofit organizations. But at the risk of offending those left out, and giving short shrift to those that are included, here are a few that came to my attention this year:

Washington Gas and the *Washington Area Fuel Fund*; *Starbucks* and the Modest Needs Foundation; *Pulte Homes* and the *Ronald McDonald House*; *Cox Communications* and the *Fairfax Boys & Girls Club*; *SAIC* and *Alternative House*; *Marriott International* and *Habitat for Humanity*; *Thrivent Financial for Lutherans* and *Habitat for Humanity*; *Cassidy & Pinkard Colliers* and the *Robert V. Murray Boys & Girls Club* in the District; *Kirkland & Ellis* and *Everybody Wins*; the *Bivings Group* and the *Washington Area Women's Foundation*; publisher *BNA* and *For Love of Children*; *Capital One* and *NPower*, a nonprofit organization that provides technical support to other nonprofits.

Also *Click2Mail* and *Toys for Tots*; *Foley & Lardner* and the *Wilkinson Elementary School* in the District; *Latham & Watkins* and *Miriam's Kitchen*; *ExxonMobil* and the *Community Summer Jobs Program* in Fairfax County; *Hogan & Hartson* and *Calvary Women's Services*; *Holland & Knight* and the *Holocaust Remembrance Project*; *Willkie, Farr and Gallagher* and the *Community Foundation*; *Mack Crouse Group* and *My Sister's Place*; *Geico* and *Children's National Medical Center*; *Calvert Group* and *Manna Food* in Rockville; and the *Association of Legal Administrators* and the *Salvation Army's* Angel Tree program.

And then there are those one-off instances, as happened this year when the District's new police chief got concerned about the lack of security for some of the items at the department's evidence warehouse. The issue came up at a meeting of the DC Police Foundation directors. Someone called someone who called someone else, and before long a check for \$45,000 for a new vault showed up at the foundation from *Target*, which is opening a new store in the District.

When I was a kid, it seemed my mother was always working what seemed like full-time on some fundraising event that urgently required me to spend Sunday afternoons with a half-dozen housewives licking stamps or stuffing envelopes. These days, however, the organizing tasks often falls to companies and their employees.

For example, *SunTrust's* sponsorship of the *Greater Washington Heart Walk*, which raised more than \$1.2 million; the work *Cisco Systems* did for the *Dulles Day Plane Pull* that raised \$132,000 for the *Special Olympics of Virginia*; *JM Zell Partners'* sponsorship of *Starlight Starbright Children Foundation's* annual gala that raised \$725,000 for seriously ill children and their families; *Van Metre Cos.* underwriting of the annual race for *Children's Hospital* in Fairfax which raised \$150,000 this year; *Cardinal Bank's* day-long golf and tennis competition, the *Cardinal Classic*, that raised \$1 million over the last four years for *Inova Kellar Center*; and the annual *Real Estate Games* sponsored by a confederation of local commercial real estate brokers, which raised \$425,000 to benefit the *Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation*.

For sheer ingenuity, it's hard to beat the contributions made by the employees of *Social and Scientific Systems*, a public health contractor in Silver Spring. For the last either years, about 40 SSS employees have knitted more than 1,500 "security blankets" for children who have

experienced trauma, illness or loss of a family member. It's all part of a national effort called -- you guessed it -- *Project Linus*.

And how about this one: *DogCentric*, a local dog-walking company, sends two employees every weekday morning to give a morning walk to all 120 dogs at the *Washington Animal Rescue League*.

Thanks to everyone who took the time to let me know about these philanthropically minded local businesses. I was able to use many submissions, but not all. If I've overlooked your company or your nonprofit organization, mark it on your calendar to send me a note next year, just after Thanksgiving.

Happy holidays.

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