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News

Foundation enables charitable groups to give

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By **RICHARD MCNEY** Chesapeake Business Ledger Editor

Published: Sunday, January 17, 2010 4:24 AM CST

CENTREVILLE Adopt-A-Bear, Character Counts, Corsica River Conservancy, Talbot Interfaith Shelter - people may have heard of some of these programs and groups, but how many are aware of the group supporting the groups?

Since 2004, the Foundation for Community Partnerships has been enabling people to donate to causes they support and providing those causes a mechanism to raise funds. The foundation opened its first fund in December 2004 and now represents 56 separate charitable groups in Anne Arundel, Calvert, Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties, with more than \$1.7 million in total assets.

In its first five years, the foundation has distributed more than \$1,660,000 to local charities. Using a conservative investment policy, the foundation avoided investment losses in 2008 when other community foundations, on average, lost 30 percent on their investments. The foundation has repeated the feat for 2009 and also spends less than 3 percent of its budget on administration, meaning more money for the charitable groups it supports.

"We wanted to make philanthropy easier and possible for all folks from different walks of life to be able to give back and also to make it easier to develop programs in the community," said Michael Clark, director of the foundation.

The foundation grew out of Queen Anne's County's local management board, the Queen Anne's County Community Partnership for Children and Families, of which Clark also is the director. While Queen Anne's County's local management board is aligned with county government, the foundation was established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, philanthropic community organization serving the entire Chesapeake Bay region. Donations to the foundation could not be considered part of county government as some viewed money that went to the local management board, according to Linda Kohler, chief financial officer of the foundation.

"The big key was the foundation was a completely separate, stand alone entity so people would feel comfortable giving money," she said.

In February 2008, the foundation received accreditation from the Council on Foundations. Of the council's 2,100 members, only 200 community foundations have been accredited.

"This is similar to the Good Housekeeping Seal for community foundations," said Steve Gunderson, Council on Foundations president and chief executive officer, when announcing the accreditation. "It says that the Foundation for Community Partnerships has demonstrated a commitment to operational quality, integrity and accountability."

The Foundation for Community Partnerships enables people who want to start up an organization quickly and who are not interested in setting up their own nonprofit to do so, Clark said. An example is the Corsica River Conservancy, which was established in 2007 by a group of local volunteers committed to restoring and preserving the Corsica River and its watershed. The conservancy set up a fund with the foundation to raise money to support its efforts and was able to focus on its mission.

The foundation also enables government organizations that are having their budgets cut to open up a fund through the foundation, which opens up other funding sources from fundraising efforts to grants they may not be eligible for otherwise, Clark said.

Terry Ober, who is the Community Traffic Safety Program coordinator for Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's counties, established a fund (Traffic Safety-Courtesy on the Road) through the foundation that enabled him to accept donations to support his efforts. His programs have been affected in the past few years by budget cuts, something the fund he set up with the foundation has helped mitigate.

"It really helps fill in the void of the money that has been taken away over the last few years," Ober said. "They are



PHOTO BY RICHARD MCNEY The Foundation for Community Partnerships held a board of directors meeting in December at the Chesapeake Exploration Center at Kent Narows.

terrific to work with."

Wayne Humphries, president of the foundation's board of directors, said the foundation is "irreplaceable."

"It encourages people to really be involved," he said. "We have enormous volunteer hours. We are very, very pleased with the kind of response we have had from people and the growth has been very encouraging."

In 2008, the foundation's funds had about \$287,000 worth of volunteer hours, according to Kohler.

"I am overwhelmed by the willingness of people to help one another - how selfless people are," she said.

Humphries, who is executive vice president of International Money Management Group, and Chairman of the Board Richard Lerner, who is president and CEO of BankAnnapolis, have helped shape the investment strategy of the foundation. The old model used by other community foundations was to use donor advised funds that would be endowed with only 5 percent going out each year, Kohler said.

"We are a grant-making organization in that we issue grants every week of the year," she said. "Most community foundations issue grants twice a year at the most."

"Our grants get out to the community quickly and make a big difference in the community," Clark said.

Returning investments in a secure and safe way has become a major challenge and to protect the funds the foundation has invested primarily in insured certificates of deposit, Kohler said.

Anyone who has an interest in doing good is welcome to set up a fund with a \$5,000 minimum, Kohler said.

"People come to us with their passion and then we sit down with them and talk about what role the foundation can play," she said.

Cyndy Bourke created the Silver Lining Foundation Fund to improve the lives of Queen Anne's County senior citizens in need. Through the foundation, she helps residents meet basic needs such as medicine, utilities and food. Recipients are referred through county social service offices including the Department of Aging. So far, she has helped close to 80 people by giving out gift cards.

"If I was to try to do something like this myself, the legal fees and services would come out of the fund," she said. "One hundred percent of everything is given right back to the person in need. There is no overhead at all. Community partnership takes care of everything. It is a wonderful organization that helps different needs in the community without the formality of starting a nonprofit."

Lerner said there are many people who are inclined toward doing great things in the community, who have small projects or issues they care about, but do not have the resources or desire to start their own nonprofit to raise funds.

"The existence of an organization like the foundation enables them to do what they want to do and make the difference in the community without having to be burdened with the administrative issues that go with running a charity," he said. "I don't think the importance of the foundation can be overstated."

This December, the foundation launched a new online fundraising event on its Web site called the "22 Days of Giving Campaign." Each day of December, starting on Dec. 9, the Web site has featured two funds and visitors can donate to any of the 56 funds or to the foundation's Community Endowment Fund on behalf of friends and family members. The fundraiser allows the foundation to promote its funds and raise money for them without spending money on a fundraiser, Kohler said.

In the future, the foundation would like to create more general funds that are not specific to a purpose, but can instead be granted by the board of directors to groups or organizations in need, Kohler said. Clark added that he would like to explore supporting the funds in the form of matching grants and growing the founding sponsors and sustaining partners program, which provides additional funding for the foundation.

Kohler said her job is the most rewarding job she has ever had and she has enjoyed building an idea into something real.

"I am so proud of the work that everybody else is doing out there and just to have a little part of that is very rewarding for me," she said.

Clark loves his job too.

"Here is an organization that wanted to do something that matters and we have done that," he said. "I feel that in a short amount of time we have done that really well. We have a lot more to do."

For information on the Foundation for Community Partnerships, visit www.creatinglegacies.org or call 410-758-6677.

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