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Wolfson Ultramarathon sponsors ‘get’ by giving

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Area small business owners find satisfaction and success through philanthropy

By Ashley Cisneros

Local small business owners find that supporting philanthropy helps the success of their small businesses. In addition to receiving personal satisfaction from supporting their surrounding communities, business owners report benefitting from their affiliation with respected charities. They receive increased exposure to new segments of the market, forge deeper relationships with clients, and network with fellow entrepreneurs and corporate executives.



These benefits often result in new business leads and work referrals.

Giving doesn't always mean conferring money. In tough economic times, many companies find it difficult to give monetarily to charitable and philanthropic initiatives. Tourea Robinson, president of the Association of Fundraising Professionals Florida First Coast Chapter, says that most small business opt to demonstrate their support of philanthropy through in-kind donations and services. Robinson reports that corporate and small business giving has remained steady in Jacksonville in 2009.

"Business owners want to know that their contributions are being used in an effective way to improve the community," she says. "They also appreciate the recognition they receive by giving, and look to have their name affiliated with a certain philanthropic program. They want to be good corporate citizens in the communities in which they operate."

Instead of contributing financially, several Jacksonville area small businesses donated time and talent as a birthday gift to Wolfson Children's Hospital. The hospital, part of Baptist Health, will celebrate 55 years of providing premium pediatric care in 2010.

To commemorate the occasion, the hospital is hosting the One to Grow On Ultramarathon on January 30, 2010. Marathoners have each committed to run 55 miles in honor of Wolfson's patients. Each mile will be dedicated to a child who has an amazing story at Wolfson.

Julia Handley, Wolfson director of development, calls the involvement of Michael LeGrand Photography, iDrive Marketing, and Hire Methods, Inc., "absolutely essential" to the development of the ultramarathon. The owners of these three small businesses say that their involvement with the event was good for business.

Increased exposure

Michael LeGrand of Michael LeGrand Photography has built a business providing photography services to companies, educational institutions, hospitals, architecture firms, and more. Clients include The Home Depot, Baptist Health, and Visit Florida.

LeGrand, whose business mostly entails shooting business professionals and physicians, took photos of 55 children for the Wolfson event. The photos appear on the event website at [Wolfson55.org](#) and

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children for the Wolfson event. The photos appear on the event website at wolfson155.org and associated materials. (Editor's note: Some of the photos illustrate this article.)

"My normal work is pretty serious for the most part, so this was a fun project for me," LeGrand says. "I was especially excited because this is my first opportunity to do philanthropy work."

LeGrand believes that business owners who get involved with philanthropy projects benefit from exposure, but more importantly from the good karma.

"It definitely gives us more exposure than we would otherwise get," LeGrand says. "It helps us grow in that respect. Aside from that, doing good to others makes others do good things for you."

LeGrand says that his involvement in the project allows him to contribute to his community. Businesswise, he says that he also benefits from new additions to his portfolio.

"Larger corporations have more opportunities and ways to give back either with manpower or money, whereas small businesses are limited by manpower and finances," LeGrand says. "We give back by providing the services that we give to our regular clients to foundations and charities. I would definitely consider contributing to a philanthropic project again."

LeGrand has donated five day-long photo shoots, plus photo editing services for each child. He says that he usually charges \$1,200 for a day-long shoot.

"I photographed a set of four-month-old twins to toddlers who were barely standing to older children," LeGrand says. "I did the photo shoots at the children's rehabilitation center in one giant room filled with toys, maps, bikes and scooters. I wanted to make sure that each photo really represented the child."

Networking opportunities and referrals

Alex Benavides founded iDrive Marketing almost two years ago to provide quality branding, marketing and advertising services to businesses without the large ad agency premiums.

Benavides became involved with the Wolfson marathon through his clients Clint Drawdy and Chad Perce of Hire Methods, Inc.

Benavides leveraged his full-service advertising agency to help coordinate the Wolfson project. He developed all of the marketing materials including the Web site, posters, fliers, and a Facebook.com event page. Business owners benefit from giving back to the community as long as certain conditions are met, Benavides says.

"You have to be doing this for a good purpose," Benavides says. "You can't get involved with charity work to make money; that's not how this works. You have to really care about the cause, and be willing to follow through with what you promise. You have to be authentic. This truly reflects to the people who are involved with the project. When you care about the people, that's when you get the true networking benefit."

Due to his involvement with the Wolfson marathon, Benavides has already generated two leads. In addition to helping Wolfson, iDrive Marketing has also contributed Web site development services benefiting First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP). Before launching iDrive Marketing, Benavides performed philanthropic work with another agency benefiting the Brunell Family Foundation, the North Florida School of Special Education, and the Sister to Sister Campaign, to name a few.

Most of Benavides' contributions to philanthropic projects have been through service.

"I've contributed to projects by finding resources for charities and leveraging my relationships with other vendors such as printers," Benavides says.

One of the biggest challenges for Benavides was finding a vendor to manufacture 55 three-foot glass birthday candles for the event. The Wolfson 55 committee is also planning a charity concert in the spring.

"If you would have asked me how to go about planning a concert six months ago, I wouldn't have had a

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clue. Now I do," Benavides says. "I've learned to stretch dollars and do amazing things with a modest budget for clients. The more avenues you have, the more creative you can be with your solutions."

Benavides estimates donating 500 to 525 hours to the Wolfson project.

"You have to be genuine when giving, and it will come back to you," he says. "The doctors at Wolfson can do amazing things to improve a child's life. Parents don't have to fly to a major metropolitan city; they can get quality care right here at home."

Stronger client relationships

Business owners Clint Drawdy and Chad Perce make service of paramount importance in their business practices at Hire Methods, Inc., the parent company of Medical Methods and iMethods Technical Recruiting.

Drawdy and Perce have been affiliated with Baptist Health for years, and Perce serves as chair person of the Wolfson event.

"Service is a large part of the culture here at our company," Perce says. "Wolfson speaks to us both professionally and personally because of the important work they do to impact children."

Perce finds that good things happen to business owners who serve their communities.

"There is a fine line between genuinely and authentically being involved in the community and having selfish motives for gain," he says. "Service is rewarding for the soul. Positive things happen to business owners when they give genuinely. These include forging deeper relationships with clients, gaining trust and credibility, and winning referrals through networking. This is about rallying around something bigger than yourself."

Drawdy believes that even smaller businesses can have a tremendous impact on the community. He says that getting involved can boost a company's morale and increase retention.

"When businesses get involved with philanthropy, they can give their vendors opportunities to give back to the community as well," Drawdy says. "In addition, business owners also have the opportunity to meet with company executives and CEOs that would otherwise be difficult to meet."

The owners say they haven't spent a lot of time quantifying the services they've contributed to the Wolfson 55 event.

"In this economic environment, we did more in-kind services this year than we have any other year," Drawdy says. "We love the fact that we give our time. If we weren't involved in the Wolfson project, many of the people in our network would not be involved either."

Drawdy has advice for business owners wanting to get involved in philanthropic activities.

"Speak to your personnel and find out what they want to rally behind," he says. "Find a cause that your staff is passionate about. Once you get a handle on that, opportunities will come more naturally."

Perce encourages businesses to not select a cause blindly.

"Picking a charity simply because they are a big name is not the way to go," Perce says. "Slow down and ask questions. You will find plenty of opportunities to serve. Don't think you're too small. No one is too small to give. Challenge yourself to get involved. If you're not involved, get involved."

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