

Teamwork central to success of nonprofits

Many individuals work and volunteer to further the missions of charitable organizations

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A nonprofit agency is made up of many different people — from the staff members to the board of directors to volunteers to participants and users.

All of these folks help an organization fulfill its mission, whether that be to provide health care or counseling services to those who can't afford them, to give people the tools to escape the cycle of poverty or to help those struggling

Making a Difference

with a cancer diagnosis.

The seven individuals featured in this story are affiliated with seven different agencies that are part of Community Memorial Foundation's family of grantee partners. Each offers a glimpse into the various roles and responsibilities involved in most nonprofit organizations.

— *Making a Difference is a yearlong partnership between The Hinsdalean and Community Memorial Foundation, whose mission is to measurably improve the health of people who live and work in the western suburbs.*

Ken Beard Founder Wellness House

Ken Beard has been involved with Wellness House since before there was a Wellness House.

Cheri Jones, Lee Koranda and Diane Hruby approached him with the idea of starting a chapter of Wellness Community in Hinsdale to support people with cancer.

"It seemed to me to be a disease that had just a lot of unanswered questions. It took its toll from a mental point of view. Just the concept of providing this type of service, this type of help, just seemed to make sense to me."

Beard was one of a small group that traveled to southern California to learn more about Wellness Community. When they returned home, the work began. Organizers had two main tasks: raising money and selecting someone to head up the program. The group was fortunate to recruit Bill Walker as executive director.

Raising money for an organization that did not exist required some creativity.

"What we had to do was sell our dream, you might say, and what Wellness Community was all about and what they had put in place and accomplished during the years they had been in operation," Beard said. "There's no question it was a major challenge. We all worked hard."

Beard became the board's second chairman in 1991. Board members first met at MidAmerica Bank until they acquired a house on County Line Road. They eventually bought a second house, built the current house, split from Wellness Community and added on to the house.

Now Wellness House is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Beard said he never thought ahead two decades when he and his colleagues were first starting the nonprofit.

"I think we have a lot to celebrate and a lot to be thankful for as an organization because we have been able to help and support so many people. We wouldn't have been successful without the community support. There have been a lot — a lot — of people that have donated generously and continue to donate generously," he said.

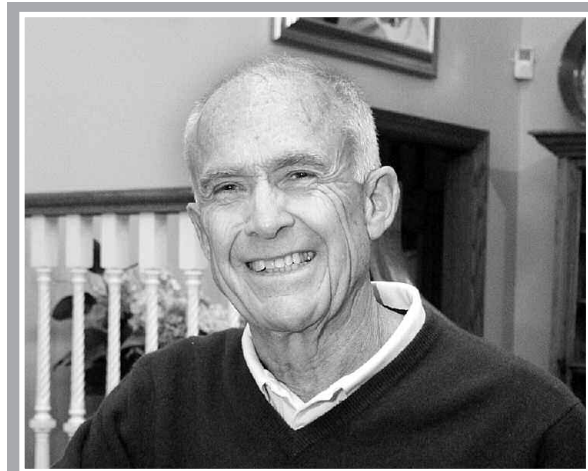
"That's what it's all about — the fund raising supporting the programming and the programming working and helping those who have cancer."

Susan Fritz Executive director Hinsdale Community Services

In the last 10 months Susan Fritz has shepherded Hinsdale Community Services through a number of changes. And more are on the horizon.

The agency is more than a food pantry, and its executive director is working to improve its programs and change its image.

"We are not just an organization where we hand out food, or we hand out clothing," Fritz said. "We



"You just jump in and you have a vision based on the need and then you jump in to try to bring that vision about."
— Ken Beard, Wellness House



"To me, it's all about team. It's also about getting behind a really great mission. It really makes you feel good about what you do every day."
— Susan Fritz, Hinsdale Community Service



"I find board participation at any level to be incredibly rewarding and such a great way to give back to the community."
— Margie Morris, Pillars

really want to foster self-sufficiency. We really want to break that cycle of poverty. We have restructured our programs in a way where we are trying to capture those positive behavior changes."

The nonprofit has started a program called E.L.I.T.E.S. — Enhancing Lives In Transition through Education Strategically — to help empower people living at the poverty level.

"We really want motivated people. This is a two-way street," she said. "This is about them really setting out their goals and being motivated enough to meet those goals."

HCS also offers a homeless transient service program and an emergency services program.

"We're going to be adding more programs to really help surround people with the resources they need," she said.

Fritz has no development director on staff, so she is responsible for fund-raising.

"I'm continually researching and looking for different corporations and foundations that may want to support an organization like ours," she said.

She also works on the annual fund drive, and having more structure and accountability in place helps with that effort. She appreciates being able "to go to a donor and say, 'This is how we changed a life.'"

This year she also will devote some of her time to planning a new fund-raiser, a June golf outing at Ruffled Feathers Golf Club in Lemont.

"We're really trying to ramp up our fund-raising," she said. "We need to get more visibility in the community."

Fritz said she has enjoyed working to build a team with her staff.

"I also try to create that with my board so they understand their roles and responsibilities and that we're all working together to move forward the mission of this organization," she said.

Margie Morris Board chairman Pillars

Whether she's driving down to Springfield for a rally, working to implement the strategic plan or advocating for the agency, Margie Morris finds serving as board chairman for Pillars rewarding.

"It's a great agency," said Morris, who began her two-year term last July. "I love that it was very community based and local. It's just been a good fit."

Morris was at a volunteer fair in Chicago when she first connected with John Shustitzky and Margaret Kachadurian from Pillars. Since that time, the agency has merged with Community Care Options and now provides services for more than 10,000 individuals and families each year who are facing challenges and crisis.

"We had to blend two existing agencies and more importantly, from the board perspective, we had to blend two existing strategic plans," she said. "We did a pretty cool two-day process where we invited

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a bunch of people from the community to come in.”

The board approved the new strategic plan in February 2009, and that document is what guides Morris in her work as board chairman.

“My primary goal is to make sure that the strategic plan is implemented and really integrated into the organization on every level — that it’s not just this guiding document, it’s a living, breathing document that people are fully aware of,” she said.

Another one of her goals is to find the best way to “leverage the skill set of the board” to benefit the agency and its clients. Board members have become more involved lately in speaking out on behalf of the organization.

“In times of stress and challenge, it seems like the most important things really bubble to the top very quickly,” she said. “I think we found that advocacy, while it’s always been important, has been more importantly lately.”

Morris pointed to board members’ efforts in December to persuade the state to pay the \$2 million it owed Pillars for services the organization had been providing since July. Board members, staff members, financial supporters and others in the community reached out to local legislators. In a couple of weeks, many of the bills were paid.

“I think we’ve seen in a very real way how advocacy can make a big difference when push comes to shove,” she said.

Sue Hickerson Director of medical services Community Nurse

Sue Hickerson spent some time working at St. Francis Hospital in Blue Island, but she always knew she wanted a career in public health.

“I had previous experience when I first started my career working at the U of I in the clinics and I loved it,” said Hickerson, who is director of medical services for Community Nurse Health Association in La Grange. “I knew eventually I would like to get back into that setting.”

Hickerson has been with Community Nurse for 16 years, starting as pediatric clinic coordinator. Her current responsibilities as medical director include supervising the nursing staff and the day-to-day operations of the adult and pediatric clinics — everything from scheduling the volunteer physicians who help care for clients to measuring program outcomes.

Community Nurse has a director of development on staff who handles most of the fund-raising, but Hickerson does get involved in grant applications. She and her staff identify opportunities to procure grant money and consider potential uses for additional funding, should they receive it.

“The challenges are always trying to meet the needs with the resources we have,” she said. “These days there is an ever-increasing need for health care as people find themselves without insurance. We’re always looking at trying to increase our support from donors and sponsors and grantors so we can help meet this need.”

The organization recently completed a five-year strategic plan that calls for an increase in service levels by 2014. Target numbers are 1,800 for the adult clinic (now at 1,045), 1,800 for the pediatric clinic (now at 1,101) and 3,200 for the dental clinic (now at 1,667).

The clinics offer primary care to individuals who do not have insurance and whose wages do not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Hickerson said the families Community Nurse



“I always say a productive community is a healthy community, and I don’t think you can have one without the other.”
— Sue Hickerson, Community Nurse



“I love meeting with donors. I love telling our story and getting up there in front of as many people as possible.”
— Heather Graves, The Community House



“It was really fun to call all the shots, get the idea down for the event and be able to execute it.”
— Bob Besio, Robert Crown

serves inspire her everyday.

“It’s their perseverance and their appreciation for the services we provide and, I think, the trusting relationship they have with us that make it so worthwhile to work here,” she said. “I love the education we provide. It’s wonderful to see the children in the pediatric clinic thrive, grow, develop into young adults.”

Heather Graves Director of development The Community House

For Heather Graves to succeed at her job, she needs to work closely with her colleagues.

Directors of the counseling department, Willowbrook Corners and Charlie’s Gift all play an important role in helping Graves raise money for The Community House.

“If I’m writing a grant or I’m holding an event, I can speak accurately and intelligently about what they’re doing,” Graves said. “Those programs are what are going to pull the heart strings and make people really want to give.”

As director of development, Graves is responsible for all fund-raising efforts, including special events, the annual fund drive, planned giving, major gifts, grants, community partnerships and capital campaigns.

In this economy, her job can be challenging.

“The hardest part is losing some of those dollars over the past year, especially on the corporate side,” Graves said. “They just don’t have the budgets.”

“We’re proud to say in 2009 we didn’t have to cut any programs, services or staff members, so that was a huge win for us,” she added.

Graves is well aware that The Community House isn’t the only nonprofit looking for support.

“There is that sense of competition because you all are trying to really sell your programs and what makes you unique, but because we are such a small town, we really try to collaborate as much as we can,” she said. “I think donors see that collaboration, and it makes them want to give to the various agencies.”

The Community House is a bit unique in that its programs, such as Jodie Harrison basketball or summer day camp, help fund its operations. Those programs are also the way many people have grown to know about The Community House over the years.

“One of the things that attracted me to taking this position is this agency has been the heart of the community since 1941,” she said. “I think that’s such a cool thing.”

Graves also appreciates all the people who help make her job easier.

“I have the support of the board of trustees and our events volunteers and all these volunteers that help make it work, as well as our staff,” she said. “If I have something going on, everybody rallies and we all support each other.”

Bob Besio Junior board president Robert Crown

Many who volunteer at nonprofit agencies work on specific tasks assigned by a staff or board member.

Bob Besio of Hinsdale appreciates that his volunteer post for the Robert Crown Center for Health

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Education come with a little authority. The 18-year-old senior at Fenwick High School is president of the junior board his mom and older brother started about five years ago.

The board typically holds one event a year, and this year's RockBand Bash took place Jan. 23. The event was quite a success, raising more than \$8,000.

"It went extremely well," Besio said. "Our main goal for this fund-raiser was not so much money-wise, but promoting Robert Crown to kids in our age group, 14 to 18."

Besio remembers his first trip to Robert Crown for the family life talk, although he didn't really want to discuss it. He has enjoyed learning more about the organization and what it offers through his work on the board.

"Going back there recently, it's been really interesting to see how it's changed," he said. "They do have more programs than just family life, which was something we really didn't know about before. I really like their drug education programs, and they're very focused on targeting childhood obesity, which I think is a major problem in the world today."

Besio has enjoyed giving back to a good cause and working with teens he might not otherwise have met.

"I've learned that charity can be fun," he said. "If you get the right people in the room together, you can really do a good event and make money for a good cause."

The junior board hasn't yet worked with the adult board, but Besio said he's been told the teens will be part of some focus groups to help revamp programs and the Web site.

"They're definitely trying to use our age group and our board to improve the Robert Crown Center," he said.

The board has grown as members invite friends to join. All the teens enjoy the opportunity to be hands-on.

"All the kids are involved in designing the fund-raiser, and we put them in charge of different committees," he said. "Just a little bit of involvement attracts kids."

Molly Salisbury Grantee partner Community Memorial Foundation

Just as homeless individuals benefit from the services offered by BEDS PLUS, that organization benefits from the services offered by Community Memorial Foundation.

BEDS has been working with CMF since the foundation's inception, Executive Director Molly Salisbury said.

Most recently BEDS was one of 49 agencies that participated in CMF's challenge grant program, which offered a \$7,500 match for money raised from September to December. The program inspired BEDS to send a special mailing and post a donation count-down on



"I think we are really blessed to have a foundation like Community Memorial that is really focused on its local agencies. They hold us to a gold standard. We rise to meet it."
— Molly Salisbury, BEDS

its Web site.

"We geared our materials very specifically to the two-for-one match," Salisbury said. "We did phenomenally. I think that this year people are very careful with how they parcel their money and knowing there was a two-for-one match was a win-win situation for everybody."

Salisbury said she's learned about a variety of topics from workshops CMF offers, from human resources to board development to accountability. And she has appreciated the chance to interact with her counterparts in other agencies.

"I've had the opportunity to meet and interface with other directors of great organizations all working to help people who are struggling," she said. "There's very little time that people take for professional development. It's local. It's excellent — the speakers they bring in are excellent."

Salisbury also points to a CMF grant BEDS received for an organizational assessment, which she says was critical at a time when BEDS was evolving from a grass-roots effort to a more professional organization.

"All the directors that I have met that have participated in this (process) have found it to be absolutely phenomenal," she said. "I still refer to this assessment. I still go back to it to make sure we're on track. The depth and quality of the assessment was something we never would have been able to afford on our own."

Following the assessment, BEDS was invited to participate in a learning circle facilitated by the consultant who completed the assessment.

"It's just been nothing but growth," Salisbury said. "It's been an opportunity."



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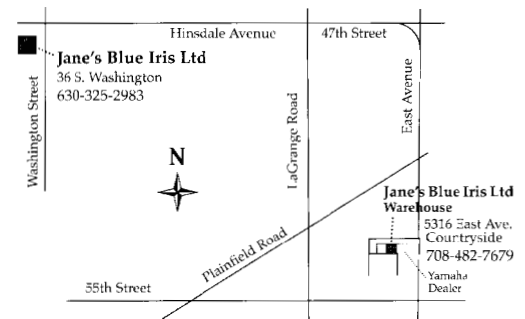
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