

# The Washington Post

## In Praise of the Corporate Heart

By Steven Pearlstein

Friday, December 22, 2006; D01

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, who died this year, famously argued that businesses ought to stick to making money and leave it to shareholders to decide, individually, whether and how company profits should be distributed to charitable causes.

Let us give thanks this holiday season that the world did not follow Friedman's advice. It is not just that having corporations involved in philanthropy increases the amount of money given to worthy causes. It is also that companies can bring unique resources and expertise to these challenges and tap into the enthusiasm and creativity of their employees.

There are countless stories of extraordinary corporate philanthropy here in the Washington region, most of which go unheralded. Here are just a few:

The death of *Josh Freeman* in a helicopter accident last week didn't simply rob the region of a successful real estate developer and resort operator. Josh was also a hyperactive philanthropist whose company foundation regularly donated more than \$1 million a year to local nonprofit groups. Arts institutions like the Olney Theatre Center and Strathmore Hall have been beneficiaries, as have the Olney Boys & Girls Club and Hospice Caring in Gaithersburg.

Reston-based *Sallie Mae* was presented with the annual Ron Brown Award for Corporate Leadership at a White House ceremony. The panel of judges cited Sallie Mae and its foundation for a \$28 million grant establishing Building Hope, which provides construction funding for charter schools in the Washington area, along with a variety of programs designed to ensure that any D.C. high school graduate admitted to college will have the money to pay for it. This year alone, Sallie Mae invested more than \$4 million in the region.

Not enough attention was paid last year when THEARC opened in the District's Anacostia neighborhood. This magnificent \$27 million facility houses a middle school for girls; training programs; a gymnasium; and arts classes offered by the Corcoran College of Art and Design, the Levine School of Music, and the Washington Ballet. And none of it would have happened but for the tireless efforts and generous contributions of *Chris Smith* and colleagues at the *William C. Smith Co.*, which was building in Anacostia long before it became fashionable.

You could fill the Palm with business executives who have tried over the years to improve D.C. public schools, only to be frustrated by the school department's central office staff. So let's lift a glass to *John McMahon*, chief executive of *Miller & Long*, a concrete company, and some of his contractor buddies for reviving vocational education in the District's schools. Early next year, the ribbon should be cut on a new facility at Cardozo High School, where more than 100 students will get training in carpentry, heating and air conditioning, and electrical work.

The Boys & Girls Clubs have always relied on the commitment of time and money from local businesses, too many to name here. But special mention needs be made of *Venture Philanthropy Partners*, put together by *Mario Marino*, which "invested" \$4.25 million this year to improve the management and organizational effectiveness of the regional organization. The 120-year-old group also received its biggest operational grant ever -- \$1.5 million -- from the *Freddie Mac Foundation* for its summer camp and educational initiatives.

One of the concerns about bank consolidation was that Washington would be shortchanged when it came to charitable efforts. So far, that hasn't happened. *Bank of America* has been particularly active with its Local Heroes and Student Leaders programs, along with \$100,000 grants this year to the Arlington Free Clinic and D.C. Central Kitchen. And under *Mike Harreld's* leadership, *PNC Bank* has decided to focus on early childhood education, committing \$10 million over 10 years.

Earlier this month, more than 2,000 yearbooks were distributed in the St. Bernard Parish (La.) Public School District, chronicling the extraordinary year its students and teachers had after Hurricane Katrina. Much of the credit goes to the staff of *Atlantic Media*, David Bradley's media empire, which helped to finance, design and produce the book of student essays and photos.

For sheer generosity, it's hard to top the \$800,000 raised by employees of *BAE Systems* for the American Cancer Society this year. BAE matched the contributions dollar for dollar.

Tech firms have been active in trying to close the "digital divide" that separates low-income households from the world of the Web. Members of the *Northern Virginia Technology Council* now have six "computer clubhouses" running, serving 1,500 kids a week, and there are plans to open two more. In the District, *Verizon* supports five neighborhood technology learning centers, each of which received \$20,000 grants this year.

Very often, corporate philanthropy takes the form of putting the arm on customers. In October, for example, *Safeway* clerks across the region asked supermarket customers to donate their change, or add \$1 to their bills, for the fight against breast cancer. The result was a \$525,000 check to MedStar for use in treating the uninsured.

But the best new idea comes from *My Plumber* of Fairfax, which offered its customers \$25 off their bills, plus a coupon for \$25 off future visits, in exchange for five cans of food each. When I checked this week, 13,182 pounds of food had been collected and delivered to local food banks.

To celebrate its 100th anniversary, Bethesda-based *Clark Construction Group* launched a special "100 good deeds" effort -- 100 charitable initiatives conceived and executed by Clark employees at its various subsidiaries. Locally, these included a picnic for soldiers and their families at Walter Reed, a Texas Hold 'Em tournament at Bethesda Naval Hospital, and renovations to numerous local playgrounds and parks. The *Calvert* mutual fund group had a similar program to celebrate its 30th anniversary.

Ever since co-founder Pat Cassidy's brain tumor was diagnosed, the employees of real estate brokerage *Cassidy & Pinkard Colliers* have volunteered time and money for the Brain Tumor Society. This year, as last, they sponsored the society's annual 5K race, which raised more than \$1 million.

And *Friedman, Billings, Ramsey* was the major sponsor of this year's Breath of Life Gala, which raised \$2.7 million for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

Out in Leesburg, martial-arts contests are becoming the charity fundraisers of choice. *U.S. Tae Kwon Do Academy* raised more than \$11,000 for Blue Ridge Hospice in Winchester, while *Tiger Claw Tae Kwon Do* raised \$8,000 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Many companies have decided that the best way they can give back is by establishing deep and long-term relationships with charities and nonprofit groups. These include *Sprint Nextel's* support of Wolf Trap's education programs and *Apex CoVantage's* support for OAR, which provides services to ex-offenders in Fairfax County. The law firm *Wiley Rein & Fielding* has become very involved with helping the homeless women and children served by Calvary Women's Services in the District. And the executive director of Miriam's Kitchen says she doesn't know how her program could continue without the support it gets from *Ridgewells* caterers. The Child and Family Network Centers have found a reliable partner in *Capital One*, as has the National Center for Children and Families in *Opus East*, a designer and builder in the District.

No matter how many executive come and go at *AOL*, the company has been steadfast in its support for City Year Washington, D.C., which brings young people to Washington for a year of full-time community service. And how about *The Forecast*, a small women's clothing store on Capitol Hill that manages to provide \$75,000 a year in cash and clothing to Our Place, DC, a support center for women who have been released from jail.

A remarkable new relationship is developing between the female employees of *Booz Allen Hamilton* and the local Girl Scout Council. The lawyers at *Dickstein Shapiro* have been deepening their involvement with Bread for the City, as have those at *Willkie Farr & Gallagher* with DC Scores.

For sheer staying power, however, nothing beats the 18-year relationship between *Woodbridge Plumbing* and Project Mend-A-House, which does home repairs for seniors, the disabled and low-income residents of Prince William County.

The best idea anyone has come up with for improving public education is linking each school with a company and its employees. In the District, these partnerships include *Akin Gump* with Tyler Elementary, *Foley & Lardner* with Wilkinson Elementary and *Fannie Mae* with Ludlow-Taylor Elementary.

Then again, not all corporate philanthropy is the result of some long-term plan, as Patricia Donnelly discovered. Donnelly, who runs an adult-literacy program in Falls Church, one day walked next door to *Bill Page Toyota* with the aim of getting owner *Raymond Page* to attend her upcoming fundraising event. Page said he couldn't make it, and she thanked him for his attention. And three days later, he showed up in her office with a \$5,000 check.