

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2011

IDEAS & OPINION

Helpful advice on helping

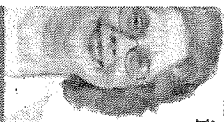
Last week, the Planned Giving Council of Cape Cod held a lunch meeting for local charities to meet donors, but not in the usual way. The program, "A Personal Journey of Giving," wasn't about soliciting donors for money, but for insight. The panel was made up of three local volunteers and donors, each giving in a different way.

Norma Schmidt has worked at Citizens Bank as a loan services administrator for about 10 years, working out of the Hyannis office. She sits on the bank's community investment committee, which gives grants to local charities, and she also works with the Cape United Way.

But recently, her volunteerism was more personal than administrative. Citizens allowed her to take a subsidized three-month community service sabbatical, so she could work at the offices of Cape Abilities, which gives jobs and training to the disabled in the Mid-Cape area.

Norma got her salary, and Cape Abilities got her skills.

To her, the most valuable part of the whole experience was learning about the daily lives of the disabled, and she was especially glad that her children were able to be involved as well. The example she provided her children was an equally powerful learning experience.



Cynthia E. Stead

Shawn Delude opened Nause Disposal 13 years ago, and has 20 years in the waste business. He calls himself "hometown garbage" vs. the "big box" disposal companies. He remarked that his varied accounts, from homes to large businesses, gave him a unique insight into the Cape economy. He founded the web site, WeSupportLocalBusiness.com, dedicated to helping locals shop local.

His involvement in Cape Cod Young Professionals started out as networking, but soon involved community, too, like attending town meetings.

The young professionals group also got involved in local charity, and Shawn began to work with the United Way. Sitting on the fund-raising committee there was a big eye-opener to him, learning about local needs and charities. In addition to donating money himself, he now tries to encourage his staff to support charities as well.

Shawn told the group to not be shy about asking for help—that young business people like himself want to help, to work for the Cape community.

Dorothy Halmstad is retired and volunteers at several Cape Cod nonprofit organizations. She started the habit of volunteering at age 16, as a candy stripper. She's volunteered for many causes, like teaching English as a second language, working as a medical volunteer and recycling. She organized a "Dump Ball" to raise money for a recycling center. Dorothy also serves as a member of the board for different charities, including the Cape Symphony and Visting Nurse Association.

For her, local charities are most meaningful, and while she does give to national organizations, the cause must be special for her. The work must be meaningful for her too. Even though she is not a very young woman, she wants to help hands-on, something stimulating, rather than filling and data entry, although she stressed that is a personal preference and many older volunteers feel more comfortable doing exactly those kinds of tasks.

Without a volunteer opportunity, she finds herself less likely to donate, and she chooses her donations carefully. What is the character and mission of the charity? What kind of administrative expenses do they have? What report does the Better Business Bureau have on them? She mentioned that "trinkets" in a solicitation make her nervous—if thousands of letters have address labels or pennies in them, how careful are they with the money she gives? Dorothy also stressed that while there were many seniors

like her, able to give and volunteer, it was important the charities reach out to younger people as well.

The panel was asked how they approached their giving, and the three answers outlined the three approaches. Halmstad said that she was only one person, so she looked to allocate her time and donations. Delude said as a businessman, he budgeted to give. Schmidt said that all she could donate was time, and she gave that to a cause she felt passionate about.

But for all three, it was a habit, a part of their lives. The donor, the small businessman, and the corporation subsidizing the volunteer worker all take advantage of the threatened tax deduction. Putting a face on charitable donation and their actions remind us why it needs to be protected.

Cynthia E. Stead is the Republican state committeewoman for the Cape & Islands. Email her at cestead@gmail.com.