

Philanthropy Corner – 11-27-11

“Community Foundation Celebrates Reasons to be Thankful”

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Thanksgiving is traditionally the time of year when families and friends gather to give thanks for the many blessings and freedoms we have. Also during November, communities across the nation join together to celebrate the acts of charity, philanthropy and volunteerism during National Philanthropy Day and Community Foundation Week. In counting our blessings, the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys (CFFK) has numerous reasons to be grateful.

First, we are thankful for how engaged our Keys community is in philanthropy. Studies show that communities with a high level of civic engagement and above-average volunteerism fared better through the recession. Although the state as a whole is on the other end of the spectrum in volunteering and helping neighbors, we know “things are different here in the Keys.” Thus, it is no surprise that we count the Keys among these impressive communities. When it comes to volunteerism, attending meetings and helping neighbors, our Keys communities are full of acts of kindness by individuals and local businesses that are continually offering their wares, time or money to ensure local non-profits can meet the needs of our community.

Second, we are thankful for our invaluable community volunteers who play a vital role in the success of every nonprofit. This coming January 20th, 2012 will mark the 11th year we have had the privilege of recognizing the volunteerism in our community at the annual Unsung Heroes/Volunteers of the Year awards luncheon. Each year, nonprofit charitable organizations from throughout the Keys join us in honoring the dedication of a volunteer who has served their organization. Hundreds of individuals representing more than 80 organizations have been recognized since the inception of this event.

Third, we are thankful for all our crucial nonprofit partners. Nonprofits in the Florida Keys run the gamut, from social justice to environmental protection and everything in between. CFFK exists to help these organizations become better equipped in delivering services to residents and reach sustainability. Nearly 250 individuals representing 72 organizations have committed their personal time to help their organizations implement best practices by attending the Leadership Success Academy board training. Plus, over 40 organizations have wisely chosen to establish an endowment or fund with CFFK to help create a sustainable future to ensure their organization’s survival for years to come.

Fourth, we are thankful Americans have become more active in shaping their philanthropic choices. Americans continue to demonstrate that philanthropy remains a core value of our society. There are more ways than ever to contribute to causes both regionally and globally, thanks in large part to the internet. Plus, citizens are making demands on our elected officials to recognize the value of charitable giving. One example is the extended deadline for individuals to make tax-free gifts to charity through their IRA until December 31, 2011.

Fifth, we are thankful for the foresight of the City of Key West to adopt a strategic plan. The City has recognized and planned for the growing criticality of public-private partnerships to guide our city. This is an important step for our residents, government, businesses and nonprofit sector to participate and work together to dictate our future. The strategic plan adopted by the City this past year demonstrates the value of a vibrant nonprofit sector in furthering the quality of life and provides numerous opportunities for the nonprofit sector to participate while advancing their missions.

Sixth, we are thankful for CFFK leadership, past and present. As we celebrate philanthropy this month, we are reminded that community foundations are one of the fastest-growing forms of philanthropy and every state in the U.S. is home to at least one. The founders of CFFK had the foresight to perpetuate philanthropy and the Conch spirit in the Florida Keys when they created the community foundation 15 years ago. Since then, numerous dedicated volunteers have served as members of the Board of Governors and shepherded the Foundation to prepare it for the next generation of giving, now and in perpetuity.

Finally, but certainly not last, we are thankful for our compassionate and passionate donors. No philanthropic effort can be successful without the generosity of donors who recognize the value and power of their contributions. Since CFFK's inception in 1996, our philanthropic partners have enabled over \$16 million in grants to local nonprofits, scholarships, and other charitable causes. At a time when individual gain and social inequity seem to consume the news, we are grateful for the opportunity to be the steward of and celebrate philanthropy. Time and again we find that more pocketbooks are open for the Florida Keys community than those that are not. For that, we must ALL truly be thankful.

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