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Picking nonprofit ally tough, rewarding task

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Q&A with Gary Youell, chairman of YHB Investment Advisors Inc. in West Hartford, about what he learned in the process of researching and selecting a nonprofit partner for a company.

Q: YHB Investment Advisors recently decided to embrace a community service project. Why? What was the firm's thinking behind doing this?

A: For several years, many employees of the company supported my partner, Paul Martel, in his medical service work with children in South America. From this effort, we determined that we wanted the opportunity to perform service locally so that we could be more "hands on" and work more closely as a team.

Q: YHB selected Foodshare as the beneficiary of the project. What made the firm get behind this particular charity over others? Is this just an employee effort or will you include clients too?

A: We brainstormed and researched a few worthwhile local charities. Foodshare's mission of feeding needy local families seemed to resonate well with everyone. Also, Foodshare seemed to provide the most varied opportunities to serve throughout the year including the annual walk in May, work at the warehouse and the Turkey and a Twenty program in November that takes place in our office building. Finally, we saw these activities as ones that might attract our clients to participate with us. They will be invited to join in each activity.



Gary Youell

Q: How does a firm choose between a local charity like Foodshare, which granted is part of a national network, vs. a nationwide charity like the American Cancer Society? Both are good causes doing good things.

A: There's no question that the American Cancer Society does great and noble work. Our employees really searched for a local organization with myriad hands-on opportunities to serve the community. The idea of helping local families that struggle with hunger seemed important to each of us.

Q: What type of due diligence should a company do before deciding to partner with a nonprofit like Foodshare? What did YHB do to vet the organization?

A: We spoke to numerous folks who had great things to say about Foodshare. Three of our employees then met directly with Gloria McAdam and other Foodshare leaders to get to know the organization better. They expressed their admiration with the rest of our team for how Foodshare accomplishes its mission. Their assessment solidified our decision.

Q: Does your support of Foodshare go beyond financial donations? Does YHB encourage employees to volunteer on company time? If so, doesn't the work still need to get done? How do you handle that?

A: We encourage all our employees to participate in various Foodshare initiatives. Some of the volunteer work will be done during company time and other work will be done on personal time. For example, the upcoming fundraising walk takes place on a Sunday; however, a lot of the organization time needed to prepare for the walk takes place during business hours. We anticipate that our warehouse work and our Turkey and a Twenty participation will primarily take place during company time as well. Our employees really work well as a team so we are confident they will help each other get our business needs met while volunteering efforts are underway. The partners of the firm feel we demonstrate our commitment to community service more profoundly by offering company time for our volunteering efforts. Providing financial resources to a charity is important. However, providing enthusiastic volunteers makes the financial donation more meaningful ... while building a sense of camaraderie amongst our employee team.

Q: YHB also supports a medical clinic in Riobamba, Ecuador. How does a local firm get involved with an international effort like that?

A: My partner, Paul Martel, established this clinic after providing years of service in South America with another organization called Healing the Children. Paul sought a more direct opportunity to meet some of the needs of the indigenous people of Ecuador. He has a staff of three full-time clinic professionals in a dedicated facility in this remote area of Ecuador. Over the years, our employees and clients have helped with the organization of the clinic, supplemented Paul's financial support, provided medical assistance and supplies and organized local activities to provide other needed materials to the clinic. This year alone, Paul will lead various teams to Ecuador on four different occasions. Paul's leadership has inspired all of us to want to contribute more to his clinic and to our local community. He's an amazing role model for us all.