

BUSINESS LEADERS BELIEVE OUR FUTURE IS WITH OUR KIDS ...

SOCIETY'S KIDS

Photo by Wes Battoclette

John Dovich, president of John D. Dovich & Associates, LLC recently met with several business leaders to learn how they combine owning a successful business with a robust and deep tradition of working within local Greater Cincinnati volunteer organizations. Mary Eisnaugle, vice president of marketing with Lykins Energy Solutions, Crystal Faulkner, Cincinnati co-location leader of Mountjoy Chilton Medley, LLP and Tom Munninghoff, partner of Munninghoff, Lange & Company, joined John Dovich for this discussion. What quickly developed was the realization that the local group of business leaders believe the future lies with the next generation, both educating and protecting them.

John Dovich: Tell us a little about the charitable organizations you are involved with. What drew you to these groups?

Tom Munninghoff: We work with St. Rita's School for the Deaf, and host a fundraiser each year. A good friend of mine, Mike Neumark, died in 2005. He was an attorney with Thompson Hine and had been on the board of directors of St. Rita's School for the Deaf. We decided to do something to both honor Mike's memory and benefit St. Rita's at the same time.

Crystal Faulkner: We started our firm 16 years ago, and once the first tax season concluded, we went into Over-The-Rhine to offer help to local start-up companies. We saw so many children on the streets and it wrenched our hearts. We realized we wanted to use our resources to help inner city students so we contacted Cincinnati Public Schools and made arrangements to start tutoring the children to help them develop math skills. The Cincinnati Youth Collaborative heard about what we were doing and asked me how we could lead an effort to get professionals out of their offices in the middle of the day and into local classrooms to mentor economically disadvantaged students. As a result, we started our program, Accounting For Kids Day (AFK Day) with the goal of teaching children financial literacy to help break the cycle of poverty through increased education and mentoring. This year we had nearly 800 volunteers who donated their time to more than 4,000 students throughout Greater Cincinnati. AFK has grown significantly and we are grateful for the support from sponsors and individuals who help make our annual event memorable and hopefully life-altering for the students.

Mary Eisnaugle: Lykins Energy Solutions has worked with CASA since 2000. CASA provides advocates for abused children that speak on their behalf in court. Judges try to keep kids aged 10 years and younger out of the courts, so our specially trained advocates work on the kids' behalf in the courtroom. Our volunteers undergo massive training, starting with a 40-hour program. I'm amazed at our volunteers that take time from their jobs, families and their everyday lives, to do this training. When they commit to serve as children's advocates, they have the rights to study the legal case, visit the children's foster home and confer with their doctors and teachers. It quickly turns into the one relationship between the child and advocate that is the one normal thing in the child's life. When Lykins started working with CASA in 2000 they served 25-30 kids a year. In the 16 years we've been with the program, we now serve 197 kids a year. In fact, over the years, working to prevent child abuse has become an underlying theme within the charitable organizations Lykins works with, so much so that they supported my creating an organization, Stopping The Abuse, that goes into every high school in Clermont County, educating kids to stop the cycle of drug and child abuse before it even starts. We also do a lot of volunteer work with the Boys & Girls Clubs in Clermont County.

JD: Given the immense work all of you and your companies do on behalf of these charitable organizations, what is your biggest challenge?

TM: Funding is a big challenge for most charities. St. Rita's has both a huge budget and huge needs. There are 180 children in the current program at St. Rita's and it costs approximately \$35,000 a year to educate each one. St. Rita's takes every child with a hearing-based need and finds a way to pay for it. Seeing everything the staff and volunteers do at St. Rita's makes us all realize how fortunate we really are. Our largest fundraising event to benefit St. Rita's is the annual golf outing we sponsor.

ME: We, too, host a golf outing that has grown to provide two-thirds of the total budget for CASA in Clermont County. We're very proud of the fact that because of the work the Lykins employees do, the golf outing grows exponentially each year, to the point where we had to add a second tee time to accommodate all of the golfing participants just last fall. We're thrilled it continues to grow, which means our funding commitment to CASA will be stronger and stronger.

JD: To build on that, your organizations need a lot of volunteers to help on an ongoing basis. Money is very important, but do you find it difficult to find volunteers?

ME: It is challenging to find volunteers. You need the passion and heart for the work. We've found that children typically spend several years in the foster care and court system, which means each one of our advocates take an oath they will be with the kids for at least two years. That's a huge commitment. I give our advocates so much credit for taking this on. Some of our advocates have more than one case. We've had instances where we've had to turn kids away from CASA and that's so sad. Unfortunately the cases are coming in to the office very quickly, so for us, it's definitely a combination of needing funding and volunteers.

JD: Let's talk for a moment about how your staff supports these volunteer organizations. My firm supports the local chapter of the Salvation Army. We adopted four families and a senior citizen for the holiday season. How do you get your staff involved?

CF: Our non profit organization, Accounting For Kids, is simply an extension of our corporate culture. Our employees love going into the schools, adopting classrooms and working with the children. It's such a rewarding experience and our staff members eagerly embrace the opportunity to give back. Our goal is to continue growing the footprint of AFK Day to reach even more students. By teaching children the importance of choices and consequences we are providing them with lessons that will last a lifetime.

JD: Well, I know my employees enjoy participating with the annual Accounting For Kids event ... we had another team in this past year's event at one of the schools and they really enjoyed being in the classroom.

ME: Our employees work throughout the year on behalf of CASA, and other volunteer groups. We have a page on our website where people can ask for assistance and we, in turn, ask our staff if they want to participate in activities such as food drives or working with the Boys & Girls Clubs – we don't say no to anything. If we have an employee who embraces a charity, we encourage them. We will pay them, on company time, to work on behalf of the charity. We never say no.

CF: We encourage our employees to get involved with organizations and causes they are passionate about. The willingness to get involved is a big commitment and we help support our staff members any way we can. We've found if you can align your business with your passion, that's the best thing!

TM: We also have staff who work on not just programs for St. Rita's School, but also for the Special Olympics. We have several staff members with family members who have special needs and we work on behalf of that organization, as well. It's good to see so many of our staff involved in both organizations.

JD: It sounds like we all have a common theme within our businesses and our volunteer work and that's one of having a passion to make life better for our next generation. Our drive to succeed in our businesses also carries over into our dedication to the charities we assist and help grow. All of us support our employee's commitment to helping organizations in need, so much so that we provide paid staff time for these commitments, whether it's mentoring kids in the classroom, organizing fundraising events to benefit the charities or undergoing training to serve as advocates for children. We've been blessed with success and it's no secret that our generation wants to give the next generation all the help we can. We are honored to give back to our community and look forward to many more years of doing just that ... giving back! ❖



Pictured left to right: Crystal Faulkner, Tom Munninghoff, Mary Eisnagle and John Dovich.

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