

Public Health Horticulture

Planting Seeds, Nurturing the Plants and Reaping the Reward



SEPHLI Year 11 Leadership Project

11/1/08

Ellie Ward, RN, BSN
Nursing Director
Dare Home Health and Hospice

Abstract

The purpose of the Public Health Horticulture project was threefold: 1) to increase community awareness and promote a positive community perception of the hospice and respite programs administered by Dare Home Health and Hospice, a division of the Dare County Department of Public Health (DCDPH); 2) to secure community based funding for the hospice and respite programs necessary to sustain them, while clearly conveying why these programs require community funding, and; 3) to help develop my leadership skills around creating and sharing a vision and building successful partnerships. The plan was to reach out to non-profit partners with the intent to develop collaborative fundraising opportunities and to plant the seeds for future opportunities to generate community funds, while also raising community awareness about representative programs by putting forward a positive image with which individuals and businesses would want to be associated.

Introduction/Background

It is no surprise to anyone that fund developers in our country have hit hard times as the ability to raise community funds is directly related to the economy and people's perception of how well off they are. With fund development down an estimated 30% nationally, it is fair to say that most individuals, families and businesses are feeling the crunch of our current economy. Dare County, North Carolina is no exception. Categorized as a "rural" county, Dare has a year round population of approximately 34,000 residents. Construction, tourism and the accompanying service industry are the lead employers. The median household income in Dare is \$48,348/year, compared to \$49,901 nationally. Dare also has the highest cost of living (with an index of 89.3) east of Raleigh, NC (with an index of 88.5). Add this all together and one gets a mental picture of the withering stream of community based financial support for social programs.

Enter the hospice and respite programs administered by Dare Home Health and Hospice, a division of the Dare County Department of Public Health. As part of our local public health department, we understand our role as a safety net provider and have developed policies and practices inclusive of fragile, vulnerable and "at risk" populations. A sliding fee scale, set at 250% of the federal poverty scale, is used to determine individual financial liability for hospice services. No one qualifying for service is denied care, regardless of their ability to pay, which means that in order to provide equitable services to under and un-insured individuals and their families, hospice, as required by Medicare, must generate sufficient revenue to cover the cost of uncompensated care. Further, our hospice volunteer program is not funded with local money and the full-time Volunteer Coordinator's salary, and all hospice volunteer related activities including trainings, travel and other program related expenses are paid for by fundraised revenues and/or memorial donations.

The respite program, now in its fourth year of operation has been sustained to date through a combination of grant and community funds with a shift towards increased community funding as grantors have indicated their desire to provide the seed money to start worthwhile services, without sustaining operational expenses. The respite program was developed in 2004 in response to an identified community need stemming from an increasing, aging population. This significant contingent

of urban retirees having relocated to Dare County without a network of family support, often times must rely on each other for their care giving needs. Many individuals and families fall through the cracks of eligibility requirements for assistive services; making enough money to render them ineligible for Medicaid or other public assistance, but without sufficient means to pay privately for this care (average costs in our area are \$20/hour, with a minimum four hour commitment). Respite support is provided by trained volunteers identified and recruited primarily through partnering churches. Respite services are made available throughout the community to eligible families, without charge. This past year, the respite program was expanded to include support for families with special needs or disabled children after numerous requests for this support came from parents and family members in our community. The only cost associated with the respite program is the Program Coordinator's full-time salary, which is covered in part by grant funds awarded by the rural church division of The Duke Endowment.

In order for the Home Health and Hospice division of the Dare County Department of Public Health to sustain the expenses related to both the hospice and respite programs it administers, nearly \$100,000 must be generated annually; a challenging feat for a community our size in a solid economy, a daunting task in the current climate.

Project Description, Objectives and Methodology

The overall project goal for the Public Health Horticulture project was to develop one new collaborative fundraiser within our community that would require the buy-in and support of key stakeholders in creating and then supporting the vision for this event (planting the seeds). One of the key elements to achieving the project goal was that all participants would have to benefit equitably and have equal weight in the decision-making processes (nurturing the plants). In setting this expectation, my goal was to build successful partnerships, not just for a single event, but for future fund development opportunities as well (reaping the reward).

Successful collaboration is an inspiring concept, and gratifying when achieved, but similar to courtship, you would not choose just anyone, and not everyone chooses you. Large corporate sponsors generally select national organizations to receive their support, where they feel they can do the greatest good for the largest numbers of people and get national visibility and recognition for their beneficence. Non-profits are at times quite territorial, often perceiving other non-profit or governmental organizations as a threat to their access to funding. In small communities like Dare County, this perspective is based in reality, as we do compete for financial support from the same small pool of individuals and local businesses. Collaboration is more readily achieved for partners with a similar mission or aligned objectives. In May, 2008, I started dialogue with Linda Saturno, the Executive Director of the Community Care Clinic of Dare (CCCD), a local free clinic and Ginger Candelora, the Executive Director of Interfaith Community Outreach (ICO), an emergency gap service funder for the most fragile and vulnerable members of our community. Like our hospice and respite programs, CCCD and ICO rely on community funds to support their operations. For CCCD, the funds it raises allow it to provide no cost healthcare services and prescription assistance to under or un-insured individuals, living or working in Dare County, based on income eligibility. The CCCD was an outcome of the access to healthcare taskforce of Healthy Carolinians of the Outer Banks and was brought to fruition through the

collaborative efforts of the Dare County Department of Public Health, The Outer Banks Hospital and Regional Medical Center. Our local Health Director, Anne Thomas, served as the first chair of the governing board and remains active as a current board member. For ICO, emergency gap service funding is provided to individuals in crisis when no other resource exists within our community or the surrounding areas to fill the identified need. Health Director Thomas also serves on the board for ICO. The concept that was pitched to these potential partners was to work on a collaborative fundraiser, sharing the resources of our respective organizations and dividing proceeds equally, thus reducing the financial impact of solicited sponsorship and/or donations on individuals and our local business community. Instead of being asked to support three different organizations, each asking separately, we would put forward one request that, if answered, would support all three entities. Having Anne Thomas serve as a link between our respective organizations with the consistency in leadership she provided, helped create a win-win.

Linda Saturno brought to the table access to the talent of concert pianist, Duke Thompson. Duke is a highly accomplished pianist and performer with a Bachelor of Arts degree in piano from the University of Maryland, a master's degree in music performance from the University of Maryland, and a doctorate in musical arts performance from Arizona State University. Duke also completed post graduate studies at Columbia University from 1978-1979 and attended Ecole d'Art Americaine, Fontainbleu, France in 1979, the Aspen Music Festival in 1980, the Brevard Music Center in 1981, and the Peabody Conservatory in 1984. Duke's brother Hunter is a psychiatrist serving on the CCCD board. Hunter Thompson offered his brother Duke's musical talent as a pianist to support CCCD fundraising efforts. After initial dialogue with Linda, which was an expression of desire to work collaboratively on a joint fundraiser that was as yet undefined, we agreed we would incorporate Duke's talent in some capacity, with his buy-in. Linda, Ginger and I went back to our respective organizations to garner support to move forward with this concept.

Interfaith Community Outreach withdrew as a partnering organization, citing a lack of board support, owing to too many fundraising activities in close proximity and a concern regarding the utilization of its volunteers to support weekend events. ICO did express its desire to partner on this event in 2009, when sufficient lead time would allow it to develop the necessary buy-in of their board and volunteers. CCCD and Dare Home Health and Hospice were successful in securing the requisite leadership buy-in. Our first challenge was finding and securing a location sufficiently large enough to accommodate the 200+ attendees we were targeting for attendance. We agreed that our preference was to not use the First Flight High School Auditorium, which is the venue for nearly all musical events in our community since they are the only facility with sufficient seating and acoustics for audiences of 250+. I suggested we approach The Elizabethan Gardens, part of the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, and a popular wedding location due to the incredible natural beauty of this site and the expansive lawn area large enough to accommodate 500 seated guests. When approached with the concept, Horace Whitfield, the Executive Director for The Elizabethan Gardens was at first skeptical. As a non-profit organization, The Elizabethan Gardens, a subsidiary of the Garden Club of North Carolina, relies on community support (primarily from collection of entry fees from visitors) to support its operations, and do not allow outside entities to host fundraising events at its location. Linda Saturno and I made a presentation to the board

chair, Patsy Zoll highlighting the vision for the event and the benefits of partnering. Following that presentation, The Elizabethan Gardens agreed to partner with us, and put forward a suggestion of combining the proposed musical event with a plein air painting event they had hosted the previous year with only a small turn out. We agreed. The date for their "Great American Paint Out" event had already been established for September 20th, which meant that we would have a short timeline in which to plan, develop and bring to fruition the combined event which we entitled, "Art in the Gardens, and an Evening with Duke Thompson."

With the key stakeholders on board and the vision created and shared, it was now time to bring the vision to fruition while also nurturing and building strong partnerships for future collaborative efforts. The members responsible for planning the event included me and the two executive directors for the partnering organizations. We met every two weeks starting June 26, 2008. I served as the leader for our group developing agendas and project deliverables and maintaining our timeline. Given the overhead costs associated with the event, the partners quickly came to consensus around applying for grant funds to help offset these costs. Initial dialogue with Carolyn McCormack, Managing Director with the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau indicated that she felt the event would qualify for the Tourism Assistance Grant (TAG); however, the timing for this grant application did not align with the timeline for the event. Conceptual planning continued on a bi-monthly schedule, while a grant to the Outer Banks Community Foundation was co-developed, focusing on the collaborative relationships and numerous benefits of having governmental and non-profit organizations working together on fund development. The grant requested \$12,000 in seed money necessary to bring Art in the Gardens to life and was submitted August 4, 2008. We received notification on September 4, 2008 that the requested funds had been awarded, and our work began in earnest.

The event as proposed would include local artists doing plein air painting in locations throughout The Elizabethan Gardens starting at 9am and continuing through 4pm, while various musicians played background music. The paintings would be put on display in the Art Gallery of The Elizabethan Gardens for the reception and silent auction starting at 5pm, with hors d' oeuvres and wine served. The evening piano concert would begin at 6pm on the Great Lawn, with a 400 year old oak tree as the backdrop, and the gardens lit up with soft and unobtrusive exterior lighting. Attendees would be encouraged to bring a picnic basket with food and beverages of their choice. Duke Thompson would play for three 20 minute segments with two 20 minute intermissions in which attendees could place their bids for the artwork and/or refresh their wine. The concert would end at 8pm and the art auction would end at 8:30pm. A rain location was established at Roanoke Island Festival Park.

Information released in the community representative of a Health Department program or service must go through an internal review process ultimately requiring approval from the Health Director. This quality assurance process assures the accuracy of the information released and also ensures a positive and consistent image of our department. With three organizations represented, every step in the process required the support and buy-in of all partners, including the respective director or boards. The number of players involved resulted in a much longer turn-around time for approval process of all conceptual ideas, media releases and printed materials. Differences of opinion from the partners were voiced throughout the process from stylistic choices such as the graphic design of printed materials, to

more substantive details such as setting the ticket prices and determining to whom to send invitations. Viewpoints and perspectives were heard from all and consensus was nearly always achieved through dialogue and compromise. The planning group developed a “deal breaker” threshold for communicating essential priorities and many adjustments were incorporated as the plan developed and evolved. A graphic artist was hired to design and produce all the printed materials with multiple edits based on partner feedback before the final product was agreed upon. A media specialist was used to develop marketing materials including press releases, radio announcements, live interviews and blast emails with equal representation of the partnering organizations. Many community organizations agreed to help spread the word about the event by sending the flyer and announcements out through their organizations’ email distribution lists at no charge. Supporting organizations included the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, Dare County Arts Council, The Lost Colony, Outer Banks Forum for the Lively Arts, Interfaith Community Outreach, Outer Banks Patron of the Arts, in addition to the representative organizations email distribution lists.

Tickets were printed and were ready by September 8, 2008. Printed invitations were mailed to more than 900 residents and press releases were submitted to both area newspapers and ran weekly starting September 9, 2008. Posters were hung in 500 area businesses and county offices. Announcements for the event ran on local TV via crawler on the government access channel. Radio announcements started September 11, 2008, running multiple times daily during peak broadcast periods. The radio announcements included samples of Duke’s piano playing and a description of the event. Live promotional radio interviews were aired on local stations on September 16, 2008 and September 18, 2008. Church bulletin announcements were distributed electronically to area churches with a request for local pastors to help promote the event since the funds raised would, in part, support local charities. Telephone calls were made to area music school teachers requesting their support in promoting the event with their music students. Art in the Gardens was also announced on the following websites: the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, the Dare County Arts Council, Dare County Government, and The Elizabethan Gardens.

String students from First Flight Middle and Manteo Middle Schools were invited to play their repertoire during the day as local artists painted throughout The Gardens. This invitation was accepted with certificates of community service awarded to each participating student along with a free youth ticket to the evening concert. Duke agreed to offer master piano classes the morning of the evening concert for a small group of top performing local piano students. This was arranged with area piano teacher Debbie Calvino for six students. The benefits of this partnering are far reaching. The youth get exposure to performing in a public setting, while we get the benefit of their musical talents. By making their involvement a positive experience, the youth and their teachers are more likely to want to work our organization(s) again in the future. The community service hours they earned go towards fulfilling the junior honor society requirements. Where youth go, parents go! By issuing free tickets, our intent was in part to entice parental and family attendance in the evening concert. Further, the strings program that taught these students was funded by the Outer Banks Community Foundation (OBCF) and we knew they were looking for ways to showcase the work of these students and to highlight the benefits of enrollment in the strings program, currently an extracurricular school program held prior to regular

classes two days each week. We had a large poster developed acknowledging sponsorship by the OBCF for the strings program and instructed the event photographer to capture pictures of the students while playing to share with the OBCF for promotional purposes.

A nine foot six inch piano was rented, along with a piano tuner, elevated staging and sound equipment and support. Food, wine and the accompanying requirements were arranged. Thirty five local artists were signed up to participate with the understanding that proceeds from the “wet art” auction would be split 50/50 between the artist and the representative organizations.

Results

On September 20, 2008 Art in the Gardens was held at The Elizabethan Gardens. Thirty five local artists participated in the plein air painting segment of this event. A picnic basket was raffled off as a means to capture contact information from attendees with 136 raffle tickets submitted. Combined with the tickets collected during the daytime portion of this event, an estimated 100 people attended Art in the Gardens and \$3,745 was raised. Feedback from participants was primarily positive with a few areas for improvement and growth. Several comments were received in regard to ticket prices indicating that people felt the \$35 adult/\$15 youth admission was too expensive. However, feedback was also received from people who regularly attend musical performances indicating they felt that the ticket prices were “a bargain” for the level of talent and other perceived positives. The location, while idyllic and truly magical lit up at night, was a barrier in terms of distance for people on the outer reaches of the community. Those living on Hatteras Island or in Southern Shores and Duck had a 25+ mile drive one way. Having the art auction in the Art Gallery, not in immediate proximity to concert attendees on the Great Lawn also proved a barrier. Allowing the artists to share in the proceeds from the art auction, while also determining the minimum bids for their art work was a mistake, resulting in pricing that was set unreasonably high, which significantly reduced competitive bidding, and in some cases any bidding.

The project objectives that I set out to accomplish were achieved as initial steps in what will undoubtedly prove to be a lifelong process. The first objective was to increase community awareness and help promote a positive community perception of the hospice and respite programs administered by Dare Home Health and Hospice. This was accomplished several ways. First, through the community awareness tools that effectively showcased the collaborative nature of the event and the equal representation of the partnering organizations. Second, through the quality of the artists and the obvious planning and organization that went in to this event. While we did not raise large amounts of money, Art in the Gardens was a first-class event with the majority of feedback from attendees indicating they would “definitely” participate again next year.

Several methods were used to get the word out in regard to why our hospice and respite programs require community funds and for what purposes these funds are used. This was accomplished through the live radio interviews, the program that was developed for the event as well as a Power Point presentation that ran on a continuous loop during the art auction promoting all three organizations and describing the use of funds raised, and the welcome and announcements during the piano concert.

The second project objective was to secure community based funding for the hospice and respite programs necessary to sustain them. As an inaugural event, Art in the Gardens did not break any records for funds raised; however, it is important to note that the foundation has been laid for future successes in subsequent years. The partnering organizations have expressed their desire to work together on this event again next year and a list of lessons learned and things we would do differently has already been compiled and summarized with the intent of enhancing this event.

The third project objective was to develop the two leadership skills of creating and sharing a vision and building successful partnerships. These skills were developed through the process of bringing this event to fruition. I would routinely ask myself, "What's in it for them?" which helped me to shift my expectations and be more inclusive of the needs of others. By creating and sharing a vision for the event that others wanted to be a part of, while also being flexible and allowing an expanded view based on the input of the partnering organizations, I gained the support of my partners and they then allowed me to lead this project. The foundation for successful partnerships was initiated by offering equitable division of the proceeds while also sharing the work load. This was then solidified by being accountable- following through on my commitments and making sure the other partners fulfilled their obligations; being transparent- encouraging open and honest dialogue even when partners disagreed so that we could come to a reasonable compromise; and making sure that equity was adhered to throughout the planning process, so that no one organization received more recognition or credit than the others.

My mentor, Anne Thomas was instrumental in helping me stay on target with these leadership skills. She and I met monthly face to face and sometimes daily by phone or email to navigate the subtleties and nuances of this project. Anne is well known and widely respected for her ability to develop successful partnerships and much of what I have learned in regard to this skill is through mimicry of her talents. Two that I employed in this project include: 1) honesty in the face of the toughest challenges communicated without malice or judgment, so that the recipient can hear what you are relaying and; 2) finding the win-win.

Conclusion

For the 12 years I have worked in the Public Health sector, one of the largest and most pervasive issues I have seen impacting this work is the lack of sufficient funding. This is due, at least in part, to the perception of public health workers that funding must come from conventional sources, i.e. local, state and federal funding or grant funds. But why not seek financial support from the community that directly benefits from public health programs and services? My experience has shown that the vast majority of people want to help those less fortunate than themselves and they want to be partners in success. In order for Public Health agencies to secure community support, they must identify programs that are not supported with local, state or federal funding and address the community perception that these services are being paid for with tax payer dollars by offering transparency and accountability in expending funds raised. By first providing excellent quality care and/or services thereby establishing a positive community image, then asking your community to help you continue or expand your mission by becoming an active partner through financial sponsorship or donation, you create a win-win that if nurtured and supported has the potential to grow into a significant source of funding. Despite the tough

economic times we are in currently, our home health and hospice program hosted the 6th annual Outer Banks Charity Classic Tennis Tournament the weekend of October 3-5th at Duck Woods Country Club and netted \$14,700 in funding. While this is an 18% reduction in funds from the previous year, clearly community support is still there for this cause. The 2nd annual PigStein event held October 25th at the Promenade had 25 competitive pit-master whole hog BBQers and more than 100 different beer varieties for sampling. This year's event was significantly enhanced after the first year failed to raise any revenue due to the overhead costs associated with this event. This year, the Dare County Arts Council was invited to join in the planning and promotion for this event and in turn, the organization received a portion of the proceeds. An estimated 2000 people attended this event and initial estimates project that nearly \$6,000 was raised in support of our hospice and respite programs.

Leadership Development

In addition to development of my leadership skills around creating and sharing a vision and building partnerships as described above, I also focused on two of my individual development goals. One of the most significant pieces of feedback I received on my SEPHLI 360 survey was that every category of respondent, from my boss to direct reports indicated that I needed to share power and responsibility more. Undeniably, I am not a process person, but am task oriented. I am motivated by getting the task/job/assignment done, and done well. My not sharing power and responsibility is about making sure the end product is of acceptable quality. It is a lot easier to do the work myself than rely on others who may have a different threshold of acceptable quality, which may mean having to re-do their work. The shift to awareness of and consideration for the process is huge for me. Allowing for the process feels like waiting an eternity for something that should have been done yesterday, but I am learning. Ironically....slowly. Working on this project was ideal for developing this skill, in that as equal partners, with equal say, I had to find a way to bring them on board and keep them there and the way to do that was to work in a truly collaborative way. This required patience and new methods of communication to achieve partner motivation and accountability as assigned responsibilities were often not completed as agreed upon. Gentle reminders and daily communication became the norm as three very busy people found the time and focus necessary to pull together a complex fundraiser on a tight time line, while also assuring the buy-in of our respective boss's throughout planning and implementation.

Another personal leadership skill I worked on with this project was managing my stress under pressure. This was also identified in my SEPHLI 360 survey as an opportunity for improvement. My stress often comes from feeling the weight of my responsibilities typically with a tight timeline and a perception of insufficient support to accomplish the assigned activity. The first meeting for Art in the Gardens event was held June 26, 2008 and the event was held September 20, 2008 allowing only three months to bring this project to fruition. Many critical deadlines were met including submission of the grant to the Outer Banks Community Foundation by August 4, 2008, all while also managing the routine responsibilities of my full-time job as nursing director for the home health and hospice division of the Dare County Department of Public Health. Daily operational issues frequently impacted my ability to focus on planning and organizing responsibilities for this event. Delegation of tasks and responsibilities became routine and were often accomplished by switching assignments with partners in order to provide the necessary flexibility and support to keep all partners engaged and actively involved.

The partners and I sought support from a broad variety of people, with staff, volunteers and community partners stepping up to the plate in response to our requests. Staff and volunteer roles and responsibilities were developed and these were filled as people were identified to fill each task. Our last planning meeting prior to the event included a run-down of each role, identification of who was filling the role and a contingency plan should the identified person/resource not come through. This planning helped ease my stress as I had a good understanding of who was doing what and the areas that would likely need additional support, and what resources were available to cover needs. Having worked with the partners for a period of three months, I also had a good understanding of their strengths and how we could work together effectively to resolve any unanticipated issues. As an outdoor event, there were many aspects of planning that were outside human control. As the weekend for Art in the Gardens approached, so did storm clouds, high winds and weather projections for a possible nor'easter. The partners agreed we would delay our decision to move the event indoors to the morning of the event. The weather held out and wind gusts were dissipated in the buffeted oasis of The Elizabethan Gardens, and I remained smiling.

Public Health Horticulture was a challenging project, working with two new community partners on a fund development event with only three months to plan and implement the proposed event. Our partner group met recently and consensus was voiced to start planning and enhancing this event for next year; a sure sign of willingness to continue our collaborative relationship, the seeds of which were sown during this inaugural event. While I believe development of the two leadership skills of creating and sharing a vision and building partnerships was achieved in bringing this project to fruition, I also understand that these are fledgling skills that will require continued attention and exposure in order to nurture into substantive skills. I appreciate the opportunity this project afforded in stretching my comfort zone while encouraging me to grow and flourish.

Reviewers: Anne Thomas, Health Director Dare County Department of Public Health
Linda Saturno, Executive Director Community Care Clinic of Dare
Steve Scharff, Media Relations Specialist Dare County Public Relations