

# Nonprofits, businesses create beneficial collaborations to better communities

Jim Elliott



The collaboration between for profit businesses and organizations in the nonprofit world is part art and part science. In today's climate of corporate citizenship and community engagement it is challenging for businesses to find the right cause or organization that can be a potential partner.

With my nonprofit, Downers Grove-based Diveheart, I discovered the perfect partner with Private Vista. Diveheart is a volunteer driven nonprofit organization that helps children, veterans and others with disabilities through a cutting edge therapy in zero gravity called "scuba therapy." Private Vista is a financial consulting and money management firm with offices in Oak Brook and Chicago.

In development of partnership, I found the firm to be a good cultural and strategic fit and a natural extension for networking and fostering friendships.

Searching for that right partner may come through casual meetings at events or through organizations that help business owners. The timing was perfect when I made my connection with Private Vista. This happened through a Vistage CEO peer group meeting where I met with Bob Westrich, one of the firm's partners.

After a daylong discussion about corporate culture versus strategy and goals at a Vistage meeting, we started brainstorming about possible opportunities in which the two organizations might be able to collaborate on a mutually beneficial project to benefit the community.

When coming together, both nonprofits and businesses must visualize how they can both better the community at large as well as clientele to achieve a win-win situation for everyone involved. For example, Diveheart helps facilitate cutting edge research with university medical centers around the country, and with the help of Midwestern University researchers in Downers Grove, they discovered that "scuba therapy" is very effective as a therapy for individuals with autism.

My proposal to the firm was simple. If many people have been touched in some way someone with autism, then there is a good chance that some of the firm's clients, staff and families have that experience as well.

In the proposal, through Diveheart I offered free scuba experience pool programs to the firm's network of clients, staff and their families who are touched by autism. With this program, the firm is reaching out to the community in a unique way that adds value to its existing relationships.

In reciprocal fashion, the firm would also extend our scuba therapy opportunity to friends and acquaintances of their clients and staff. By going beyond their immediate sphere of influence, this firm has a chance to reach new potential clients.

Through my connection with the firm, the tangible benefits of a nonprofit and a business collaboration are these:

- When a nonprofit and a business work together, there are opportunities to benefit different target audiences. When a nonprofit presents a free chance for the business' clientele to try a program, that business adds value to current relationships while reaching out to new prospects.
- By introducing new audiences to an educational and beneficial program, the nonprofit may receive new participants and potential donors to its mission and vision. Some of these participants can reach others by sharing their positive experiences.
- Another way to reach to people is through traditional and social media outlets. Those outlets that publish or post "feel good" stories about the nonprofit and business partnership will build instant exposure and goodwill within the community. Both the nonprofit and business can use their own social media channels to post their efforts as well.

• Jim Elliott is the founder and president of the Downers Grove-based nonprofit Diveheart.