



Everything Jersey

Celebrating Corporate Social Responsibility

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By **Robert Stack**

Recently Oprah Winfrey had New Jersey Governor Chris Christie accept a \$100 million donation from Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook to improve Newark's school system. I give Mark an A in Corporate Social Responsibility.

When asked in a January 30, 2011 interview about why he gives to charity, Michael Bear, Lord Mayor of the City of London said, "We all have an obligation to help those at risk and who are less fortunate." He adds that his most passionate cause is supporting vulnerable people.

In the state of the state, President Obama proposed a freeze on domestic spending but said that the most vulnerable should be protected.

The ostensible logic behind the stimulus package was to improve the economy. The mantra by every elected official is jobs, jobs and jobs. Nurturing small business and tax cuts are navigational methodologies to exodus the maze of a bad economy. The small business mantra is one answer, but it is not the panacea. A simultaneous strategy is suggested. Government leaders need to look at the non-profit sector as a viable option.

In New Jersey alone there are almost 300,000 people employed in the non-profit sector. It may not pay the same salaries as Wall Street but as the cliché goes "it is main-street. Ameliorating the non-profit sector not only creates jobs and improves the economy, it actually improves the human condition.

On February 1st, my colleagues and I will be ringing the NASDAQ opening bell celebrating Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR. I was chosen to do this because of a 22 year old non-profit, Community Options. Incorporated in 1989, Community Options started in a small row home in Bordentown, New Jersey. Today with an \$80 million annual budget and over 2,500 employees there is cause to celebrate the microcosmic but still effective potential that this idea turned into throughout the country. The mission is to develop housing and employment for persons with disabilities. The federal, state and philanthropic principles have figured out that Community Options and many other non-profits provide a higher quality and more affordable product than the government. The cost of an institution for people with disabilities is double that of a community program.

Over the last 10 years, in spite of the recession (or possibly because of it) Community Options has grown about 10% per year, every year. Community Options has purchased over 150 residences and in this housing market can only prove to show positive ramifications. As a non-profit we do great things and we are obviously not infallible, however, the governmental regulatory oversight is comprehensive and rigorous.

So many elected officials are waking up to the severe deficits in their counties, states and of course the \$1.5 trillion federal deficit. They are looking at these horrific budget shortfalls against a backdrop of not making the most vulnerable even more vulnerable.

With ringing the opening bell at the NASDAQ and all of us celebrating corporate social responsibility, we will also be celebrating our upcoming Cupid's Chase which will be the largest nationwide 5k race held on Feb. 12 in 24 cities and ten states. We have experienced and continue to experience nationwide the new matrix of CSR. With our Chair, Mary Pat Christie, First Lady of New Jersey, we know it will be a wonderful success. We need greater awareness of how non-profits assist with the most vulnerable, help the economy, find jobs and improve society.

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