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Businesses working to help communities

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After making a decision to not seek a fourth term as Mercer County executive, and spending some time in the private sector as a consultant and entrepreneur, it was important for me to move into a role that would allow me to work with and connect the public and private sectors.

In my new role as the president and chief executive officer of the Mercer Regional Chamber of Commerce, I am fortunate to forge these new partnerships every day. The Mercer Regional Chamber of Commerce recognizes the importance of non-profit organizations in the social service sector and their role in providing for economic growth.

The term "CSR," Corporate Social Responsibility, started in the early 1970s. It is a term that is beginning to gain wider traction and broader, inherent meaning. Highly debated and criticized as a way to distract from the fundamental economic role of business, CSR is proving to achieve the opposite. The purpose of CSR is to work with communities to build a solid infrastructure for economic development, while helping organizations achieve both their business and social missions. CSR is the dotted line that connects and elevates public and private partnerships.

For example, I recently became more closely associated with a local nonprofit organization, Community Options, which has been supporting people with disabilities since 1989 in Mercer County. Their work in the areas of employment and independent living has helped to make citizens with disabilities productive members of our community; enriching our workforce and contributing to our economic vitality.

Robert Stack, the founder, president and CEO of the organization, works tirelessly with his staff and volunteers to ensure that people with disabilities live extraordinary lives in the community and out of institutional settings.

There are numerous leaders and organizations that work with similar passions. They are dedicated, tireless and effective. These are people and missions that I can support.

One particular event designed to forge a partnership between private businesses and non-profit organizations to enhance our ability to achieve economic and social independence for the disabled is the Cupid's Chase 5K Run. Community Options hosts this nationwide event held in 24 cities across 10 states on the same day, and at the same time. Mary Pat Christie, the First Lady of New Jersey is the Honorary National Chairperson of the Cupid's Chase 5K Run. The Cupid's Chase 5K Run is an excellent example of how corporations can partner with and support a local nonprofit organization on many levels from sponsorship to encouraging their employees to participate.

Although the current business climate may have us thinking we can't help, we need to consider the larger consequences of not playing a role. CSR for our businesses is not far out of reach and being involved will increase our ability to sustain economic growth and serve as positive motivation for our workforce. The cost of participation is relatively small. The cost of doing nothing can be debilitating.

Join Community Options for its third annual Cupid's Chase 5K Run on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2011. Visit www.comop.org/cupidschase for more information and to see how you can get involved.

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