

# GIVERS LOOK FOR SLIVERS OF HOPE IN LEANER TIMES

Charities are dealing with less government funding and tighter purse strings of big donors.

BY EMILY NIPPS  
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TAMPA — With various costs up and the economy down, Alpha House executive director Bonnie Christiano had to make an especially humble plea in her upcoming October newsletter message.

"I basically said to people, 'Please, if you can, consider us in your end-of-the-year giving. We know it's a struggle this year, and we're struggling too,'" she said.

The nonprofit Alpha House, which helps and houses pregnant women in crisis, is not alone. It's among hundreds of local charities that are bracing for a lower giving season than usual, said David Fischer, president of the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, which gives to most of them.

Many like Metropolitan Ministries are feeling it at the most basic level, struggling to fill their food pantries. The poor and homeless outreach organization recently announced a critical need for food and said it was thousands of dollars behind after the first two months of its fiscal year.

Not only have charities seen a reduction in government funding, but some of their wealthiest donors are feeling a little less wealthy after seeing their investment portfolios falter. That has translated to less cash for personal luxuries — and apparently for charities, too.

While rich people generally don't like to talk about the state of their pocketbooks, the signs of cutbacks are evident: Luxury department store chain Saks



**Lea Davis, left, always tries to give away 10 percent of income. Lisa DeBartolo says her family foundation plans to give more than usual this year.**

has shown a steep and steady decline in sales, according to the *New York Times*, and *Fortune* reported that the normally recession-proof luxury business — Burberry, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent — is slowing in growth.

Donors often designate a percentage of their investments for donations, so when their portfolios decrease, giving automatically goes down, too.

Donors "have got to be affected because the security markets are down and they have their wealth engaged in investments," Fischer said.

That's the case for Lea Davis, who gives to the Community Foundation as well as other charities. She and her husband, Stanley, who are retired, are active in fundraising for the arts, but said they tend to focus on health nonprofits such as American Red Cross when finances are tight.

"We always try to give 10 percent of our income, no matter what," she said, "even if it's lower during a particular year."

The Davises aren't alone.

The Community Foundation collects most of its grant money from people who open accounts starting at \$10,000. It serves every kind of local nonprofit from cancer awareness to dog and cat shelters, and Fischer expects less giving this year than usual. He's trying to balance that with the higher demand for dollars that all of its charities are experiencing.

As for Alpha House, its expenses are expected to be around \$1.45-million, yet Christiano thinks the Tampania Avenue facility will bring in about \$50,000 less than that.

"We have cut back on everything we can think of," she said. "We have cut back our training budget, disconnected light bulbs ... It practically gets absurd."

Allison Beard, who serves on the boards of the Tampa Theatre and the Junior League of Tampa and is active in various other charitable organizations, is well aware of the tough times.

"My husband and I both have jobs in the real estate industry," she said in a recent e-mail. "So we experience the downturn personally almost every day as we come across good people in unfortunate situations."

She knows from experience how difficult it is to coax people to give during years like this one, but feels that a solid, organized and well-planned charity should focus on riding out the tough times until things get better.

"Raising money is never as easy as it seems, regardless of the status of the economy," she said. "So in tougher economic

times it is even more important than ever for an organization to focus on their core mission and vision, and to plan their fundraising around that mission and vision."

To offset shortfalls for some charities around the state, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, which donates team memorabilia and gives grants through the Glazer Family Foundation, is giving more donations and grants than usual, said Miray Holmes, the Bucs' director of community relations. The foundation has even gotten requests from struggling individuals, she said.

"Unfortunately, that's not something we do," Holmes said.

The DeBartolo Family Foundation also plans to give more than usual this year. Because foundations keep an ongoing pool of money that builds, they are able to weather weak giving years.

The DeBartolo foundation focuses on lesser known charities and was able to dole out more grants and scholarships this year than last. That included \$25,000 to the Tampa-based Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered, or FORCE, which focuses on hereditary breast and ovarian cancers, and \$25,000 to MacFarlane Park's Freedom Playground for children of various abilities and disabilities, said Lisa DeBartolo, who runs the foundation.

"I think in general, if we have the funds to give," she said, "we give them."

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