

Polk County Treasurer Employees Celebrate 10 Year Anniversary of HOPE in their Hearts

For the past ten years Polk County Treasurer employees have donated to over 83 charities through a simple, painless process: Each employee who donates receives the perk of dressing down to casual. As donation mechanisms go, the program is elegant: Employees pay for a perk, knowing their payment will go to a good cause.

In September of 2003 staff members brainstormed and proposed a plan to Polk County Treasurer Mary Maloney which would inspire community involvement by a government office without government funding. The project would be called HOPE or **H**eat **O**f **P**olk **E**mployees with the main objective focused entirely on community outreach.

During the last full week of each month the HOPE committee independently coordinates, collects and distributes donated goods to a community organization of their choice. The staff-run committee of six manages and facilitates the entire project. The six members establish and maintain a list of organizations the contributions would benefit, communicate with the organizations, and coordinate the delivery of donated goods. Committee members serve on a two year rotation. During the contribution rally week each staff member who chooses to participate in HOPE donates on average \$10 to \$20 to the monthly cause in exchange for the benefit of wearing casual dress attire.

Since HOPE's inception many organizations have benefited from this team's efforts. The list of organizations varies from time-to-time to include special contribution funds such as the 2005 Hurricane Katrina Victims Fund. In September 2006 staff collected for Amanda the Panda who provides support to grieving children and their families. For a month in 2007 and 2011 staff sponsored our U.S. troops overseas. HOPE has also sponsored two fellow Polk County employee's families who had endured a hardship.

In the time the program has been running approximately \$64,200 worth of staff donations have benefited central Iowa organizations. Polk County Treasurer employees are very proud of their efforts. As the goods are collected they are showcased in the Property Tax/Motor Vehicle Public Service Room for citizens to see the resulting impact of the boxes of food, pet supplies, school supplies, etc.

The ancillary benefits recognized with this innovative project include the engagement in a meaningful contribution to the community giving a sense of fulfillment, the opportunity of placing a human face on public service, the positive team building effect, and a boost to office morale. It is in this expression, reflecting sensitivity for the needs of others, which has powered this staff-run project for ten years and running.

Polk County Treasurer Mary Maloney calls Treasurer Employee's "the most generous people I have encountered." HOPE contributions this year are going to help Gigi's Playhouse which helps children with Down Syndrome, US Army for children 3 to 13 years of age with parents deployed away from home, Children & Families of Iowa to help at risk teens, Amanda the Panda, and Animal Lifeline. In December 2012, HOPE will deliver items of great need to children with hardships during the Christmas holiday.

The Treasurer employee's HOPE program is known locally for its generosity. While doing business in the Treasurer's Office, a local Therapeutic Massage center graciously donated a ½ hour massage to the sponsored charity for the month after learning about the HOPE program and monthly donations.

This kind of giving is entirely repeatable by any group of employees with charity in their hearts. We see another plus for employers and employees who encourage contributions for casual days: The initiatives help create a culture which includes kindness and generosity.

