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HVL man shifts gears from 'what works, to what matters'

By Denise Freitag
Staff Reporter

Gale Smith, 67, believes there are two basic reasons people become involved in philanthropy: the love of mankind or because it makes you feel good.

"I'll never become a Mother Teresa. I do it because it makes me feel good," said Smith.

As president and founder of The Smith Family Foundation, Cincinnati, he must constantly have a smile on his face.

The foundation, started in 1996, provides business planning and financial assistance to Greater Cincinnati nonprofit organizations that focus on helping youth.

After spending many years in the business world, Smith wanted to give back to the community.

"I found myself looking not for what worked, but for what matters," said Smith.

He became involved with charities helping children after learning about the Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati.

The school was started by president Cleaster Whitehurst Mims, and modeled after the teaching methods and techniques of educator Marva Collins. Collins started her own Chicago classroom in 1975 as an alternative to public schools.

Enrollment has been as high as 250 kids. The school provides an education alternative for children others have given up on teaching, said Mims.

The foundation has been a tremendous help to the school financially, she said.

"I do think Gale is very sincere in his efforts. ... He really seems ready to support us anyway he can," said Mims.

"Smith Family Foundation has a clear vision. We want to be a leader in the community we serve in showing others by example the potential we all have to make a difference in the lives of others," said Smith.

Many people want to make a difference but are not sure how to make it happen, he said.

One way the foundation helps is through financial support.

Several golf-a-thons are held between late April and early October to raise money for nonprofit organizations and the foundation, said Smith.

The goal this year is to raise at least \$100,000. The money primarily will benefit the Cincinnati neighborhood Over-the-Rhine, where he purchased an entire block of buildings in July, he said.

Golf-a-thons will be held for Crossroad Health Center and Sign of the Cross Ministries, which provides housing for homeless people. Both are in Over-the-Rhine.

Give Back Cincinnati, a nonprofit organization of young professionals committed to volunteerism, Multiple Sclerosis Center,

and the Aubrey Rose Hollenkamp Children's Trust Fund, which offers scholarships and helps families with sick children, also will benefit from golf-a-thons.

"We are working to help our youth reach their full potential and destiny. Anything less is just not good enough," said Smith.

Though providing financial assistance is an important aspect, he also recognizes the need to help nonprofit organizations become self-sustaining through business planning, said Smith.

Grants can be hard to find and usually are a one-time benefit, he said.

The foundation recognizes "extraordinary givers" who make a positive impact on the lives of children through its The Secret of Living is Giving Awards.

A medallion on the base of the award includes a picture of a pelican. According to legend, the pelican will tear at its own flesh to provide food for her family when nothing else is available, said Smith.

This selfless act represents the sacrifices award winners have made for youth and their community, he said.

Smith also tries to stay involved with his own community. He helped develop a 10-year plan for Hidden Valley Lake and has supported the Joe Tarantino Memorial Golf Classic at Hidden Valley Golf Course.

"He is a friendly, fast-moving, hardworking man. ... He likes to help people," said HVL resident Russ Dickman, who has known Smith for more than 25 years.

Smith has relied on Dickman, a retired sign painter, to inscribe words and numbers on ceremonial checks to charities.

When Dickman and some of his young art students created a Sept. 11 memorial for the entrance of Hidden Valley Lake, Smith gave each of the youths a gift and provided them with a luncheon, said Dickman.

Smith hopes the foundation continues to make a difference for years to come. Along with his wife, Laura, who is secretary, his four children are involved in the foundation as vice presidents.

"I want my family to say I can't think of a better way to continue his legacy than to continue the principles he initiated," said Smith.

For more information about the foundation or how to help, call 1-812-537-4795 or 1-513-564-8747, or visit www.smithfamilyfoundation.org.

* This is the second of two parts focusing on Hidden Valley Lake resident Gale Smith and his work and nonprofit foundation.