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Wednesday, January 14, 2004

Give back Cincinnati

Looking for some fellowship with your philanthropy? The group with the curious name is always in search of a few good hands

TABARI MCCOY | CIN WEEKLY

After three years, you might think Jodi McIntosh would be tired of getting asked the same question all the time - what exactly is Give Back Cincinnati?

But she's happy to explain the group's mission, especially after last Saturday, when a hundred people showed up to help restore what will become a new community center.

McIntosh is the membership director for the federally-recognized non-profit organization, which was founded in December 2000 with one simple goal: to help communities and the individuals in them develop into tomorrow's leaders.

Saturday's big turnout furthered that mission. The center, which will be known as the Dirigar, is designed to provide a community gathering place. The center will also be home to LearnIT, a new non-profit agency for young adults interested in information technology training, mentoring and support.

Gale Smith, president and namesake of the Smith Family Foundation behind the center, is the visionary behind the project. The retired businessman says he is after "not



Matt Smith of Oakley and Jen Hoffert of Hyde Park paint a stairwell at the Dirigar Center in Over-The-Rhine on Saturday, Jan. 10. (Photo by Leigh Patton/CiN Weekly)

GET INVOLVED

Are you looking for ways to help in Cincinnati? These groups can get you started:

The Smith Family Foundation

224 W. Liberty St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202
(513) 564-8747
www.smithfamilyfoundation.org

Give Back Cincinnati

617 Vine St.
Suite 1200
Cincinnati, OH 45202

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what works but what matters" and calls the center his foundation's way of showing the community there are people outside of it who care about them.

"My mission is to provide support to social entrepreneurs and effective youth-serving organizations, and the foundation provides awareness, business planning assistance and resources to organizations that strive to bring hope and opportunities to those in need," Smith says. "I'm convinced that people will look back on this time in the history of Cincinnati and be amazed that they couldn't see this coming."

The 29-year-old McIntosh credits Give Back Cincinnati's founders with having a future-first vision when they started the

organization. McIntosh said the founders were among a group of young professionals looking to continue charitable efforts after college, which led to the group's first project at Norwood Elementary.

McIntosh says the positive response the group gained from the experience has lead to "what started at 50 people" growing to nearly 1,300 volunteers representing 375 companies. The volunteers, she says, are "the heart and soul of the projects."

"They're the ones out picking up paintbrushes and spending time with the children," she says. "There's something to be said about our corporate sponsors as we have them because they see the impact we're making. If we didn't have the volunteers we have, they wouldn't be prompted to stick around every year as they stick around because they like what we are doing."

That's why even though she says people ask her all the time what Give Back Cincinnati is all about, she never tires of telling them.

"The biggest thing is it's not about the corporate sponsors, the media, the newspapers or anything like that. It's not even really about the volunteers themselves. It's about making a positive impact on the people around us," McIntosh says. "We just want people to feel like and know there are different outlets out there to just be involved in Cincinnati in different capacities, whether it's volunteering or patronizing the arts or other business."

Smith's glowing endorsement of the organization suggests he believes many other people would agree.

www.givebackcincinnati.org

UPCOMING EVENT

Give Back Cincinnati will welcome The Cheesecake Factory to Kenwood Towne Centre with a benefit for Dress for Success. On Feb. 13, the restaurant's grand opening will feature a buffet and live music. Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased by calling (513) 651-3372.

PHOTO GALLERY

- [More photos](#) from a day with Give Back Cincinnati.

"Anybody between 18 to 34 looking for a program to contribute to, I really couldn't recommend a better company than Give Back Cincinnati," he says. "They are quite simply a jewel in the making (and) they're making a major impact to young people. I just can't say enough about them."



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