

Restoring Art and Community: Social enterprise brings light to a Pittsburgh church

by Kate Sphar

For the **Union Project**, what began as a cost-saving solution to an expensive problem has grown into a unique social enterprise.

In 2002, the founders of the Union Project purchased the vacant **Union Baptist Church** in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The church was in desperate need of renovations; in particular, its numerous stained glass windows had suffered from one hundred years of neglect, pollution, and harsh weather. Executive Director Jessica King and Associate Director Justin Rothshank received bids for the restoration work for over \$1 million. “We couldn’t afford to spend that kind of money on the windows,” says King, “so we had to find a creative way to get it done.”

The Birth of Glass Action

The Union Project quickly hired Catherine Berard, an experienced stained glass artist and restorer, to teach stained glass restoration classes at its church facility. “The big question was whether people were going to pay to repair someone else’s windows,” says Berard. “But we found that the classes brought together a diverse group of people who had a variety of reasons for being there.” Some people wanted to learn a new skill. Others had old stained glass in their houses and wanted

to repair it themselves. Still others were members of the community who wanted to give back. “As it turns out, the students were much more reliable than volunteers. Since they were paying for the experience, they were much more likely to show up,” says Berard.

At first, the conditions under which the classes were offered were extreme. There was no heat in the church, and most of the building was still under construction. “We offered the first of our eight-week classes in the middle of winter, and it was cold and damp in that church,” notes Berard. However, more and more students were signing up for classes. Soon, Berard was teaching two eight-week workshops at a time, and on weekends the Union Project had added more intensive three-day sessions, which attracted individuals who lived outside of Pittsburgh. Overall, the class offerings were extremely successful, and helped to increase the sense of community and ownership that the Union Project strives to cultivate.

Elizabeth Speed is a Union Project board member who also took an intensive weekend stained glass class with her husband. “We spent a weekend restoring one of the main windows in the sanctuary. We really felt like we had a sense of ownership, like it was ‘our window’. It is noticeable that you don’t take anything home at the end of the day. However, you’re more

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Editor's Letter:

Dear Reader,

You'll notice two changes that occur with this issue, one in print and one online. The print version of SER is going bi-monthly, and the SEReporter.com web site will be incorporating an SEBlog, and soon after an SEWiki. You'll be able to find helpful ideas online more frequently and be able to post articles and comments too.

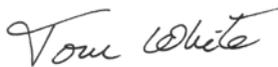
One of the better blogs I've discovered is Guy Kawasaki's *How to Change the World: a practical blog for impractical people* at blog.guykawasaki.com. Guy is an entrepreneur, investment banker, venture capitalist and author of *The Art of the Start: the Time-Tested, Battle-Hardened Guide for Anyone Starting Anything*. He was also a great keynote speaker at the 2004 Social Enterprise Alliance Gathering.

In Guy's blog entry of March 22, "The Banality of Heroism", he quotes Stanford psychology professor, Dr. Philip Zimbardo, and Zeno Franco, from their article in *Greater Good* magazine (where I also work), about nurturing one's heroic imagination:

- Maintain constant vigilance for situations that require heroic action.
- Learn not to fear conflict because you took a stand.
- Imagine alternative future scenarios beyond the present moment.
- Resist the urge to rationalize and justify inaction.
- Trust that people will appreciate heroic (and frequently unpopular) actions.

As Guy suggests, "heroic imagination" is clearly the hallmark of social entrepreneurs too. I'll be attending the SEA's 8th Gathering later this month in Long Beach and look forward to meeting some of my heroes: social entrepreneurs like you. Please be sure to stop by to say hello at the SER booth. And look for the SEBlog and Wiki coming soon to SEReporter.com.

Best wishes,



Tom White
Editor & Publisher

PUBLISHER'S GUARANTEE

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Diversity Recruitment and Employment at the National Urban League: Advancing mission while generating income

by Ettice Womble

The **National Urban League** is a non-profit, non-partisan, civil rights, and community-based movement that serves over 2 million people, providing direct services, research and policy advocacy to help individuals and communities reach their fullest potential. Primarily working with African-Americans and other emerging ethnic communities, its network of over 100 professionally-staffed affiliates in over 35 states helps to close the equality gap for people at all economic levels and stages of life.

Established in 1910, the Urban League movement responded to the migration of hundreds of thousands of African Americans to the urban and industrial areas of the North. For over 95 years, the Urban League has pioneered and excelled in the field of Diversity Recruitment and Employment (DRE). Through research and advocacy, its DRE programs have addressed discriminatory hiring and improved workplace opportunities for Americans across the country.

In its early years, the Urban League grew into a nationally recognized organization, operating in 29 cities and finding jobs for nearly 65,000 African Americans. Today, eighty-five percent of the Urban League affiliate network provides employment-related programming for over 200,000 youth and adults, placing over 16,000 individuals into jobs.

Urban League employment-related services encompass job training, recruitment, screening, placement, outplacement, leadership development, diversity training and auditing, job coaching and development, job fairs and job bulletins.¹ Nearly all Urban Leagues engage in labor exchange where employers forward unsolicited vacancy notices to the local Urban League offices. Urban League

affiliates allow jobseekers to review and apply for openings independently or with UL support.

The Economic Opportunity Institute



Carmen Watkins and Eric Goodie of the Houston Area Urban League

The League has also extended its expertise in economic development to the nonprofit world. The Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) is NUL's strategic initiative to interject and cultivate social entrepreneurship throughout the Urban League movement and other nonprofit organizations.

With the financial support of the Prudential and Marriott Foundations, EOI graduated its first EOI Executive class of twenty-three affiliate CEOs in 2003. The interactive seven-day EOI course offers nonprofit leaders both the theoretical understanding and practical techniques needed to explore, establish, and expand social enterprises.

More than 65% of the first EOI Executive class have launched or expanded their social entrepreneurship activities (see sidebar). EOI graduates have successfully launched recruitment, screening, and placement services with corporations, nonprofits, small businesses among their target purchasers.

The EOI is committed to a strong nonprofit sector, emphasizing the importance of advancing mission while generating income. The 2005 Urban League Census showed 47% of NUL affiliates generated income of over \$10,408,755. In addition to Executive classes, EOI achieves its goals by providing Urban League executive leadership with tailored executive training, year-round technical assistance, and access to social investment capital, an internal complement to the National Urban League's Economic Empowerment Agenda.

¹ 2005 Urban League Census, National Urban League.

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Stakeholder Engagement Strategies: Don't settle for first impressions

by Jerr Boschee

We were sitting at an outdoor table in southern California . . .

My daughter and I are both progressives, but I'm a child of the '60s and she's a child of the '90s. We live in different worlds – a truth brought home to me dramatically as we spoke.

Conversation turned to politicians we admired and we began talking about Barack Obama and his burgeoning race for the Presidency. We both like what we've seen of him, but agreed he still has a lot to prove to the American public.

Then I paused and drifted for a moment. Memories of the 1960's came flooding back. Lee Harvey Oswald murdered John Kennedy when I was a sophomore in college. Fifteen months later three gunmen shot Malcolm X 15 times as he began speaking at the Audubon Ballroom. James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King Jr. four days after I started Peace Corps training – and eight weeks later Sirhan Sirhan assassinated Robert Kennedy just down the road from our Peace Corps training site. Shattering experiences that shaped me, and others.

I looked at Liz. "I'm afraid," I said. "If Obama becomes a serious contender, I just hope nobody shoots him."

She gave me a startled look. "I can see how you'd say that," she said, "especially given what happened in the sixties. But it never entered my mind." The headlines shaping her and her contemporaries are very different ones: Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, Bob Packwood and his 29 accusers, Mark Foley and his Congressional pages. She looked at me: "I'm just worried there might be an intern out there . . ."

She didn't need to finish the sentence.

Her reaction caught me off guard and reminded me again that she and I have different realities. And, as I thought about our conversation during the next few weeks, I realized we often forget how true that is in *all* our relationships, both personal and professional.

What does any of this have to do with social enterprises? Well, stakeholder engagement strategies are critical to their success – and yet we frequently forget how important it is to really know our stakeholders before we

try to gain their support.

As I've written in this space before, stakeholder relations are rooted in the answers to five questions:

- What must happen for us to be successful?
- Who has to be involved?
- What do they have to do?
- What do they have to *believe* before they will do it?
- And what do they believe *now*?

All of marketing communications is an attempt to close the gap between the answers to the fourth and fifth questions. But how can we intelligently begin doing so if we don't

thoroughly understand the world in which the stakeholders exist—especially their emotional and psychological realities? If a child of the '60s is talking to a child of the '90s (not to mention a father of 62 talking with a daughter of 29!), how can we be sure we're even using the same words to mean the same things?

Getting across a message is a tricky thing. Trying to send one is fraught with dangers:

- The person sending the message has certain experiences, certain levels of expertise, defines words in certain ways, has certain blind spots—and all those idiosyncrasies influence the message.

- The message itself contains words, phrases and connotations that have specific meanings to the sender—but may mean something entirely different to the receiver.

- The vehicles we choose to send the message frequently fly right past our intended audiences—and in this day of instant Internet communication, how many of us who grew up with ditto machines and manual typewriters *truly* understand how to use viral marketing strategies (let alone whether to invest our time in making speeches, writing op-ed essays, issuing news releases or creating brochures)?

- Then there's the clutter —according to the Advertising Federation, the average American is bombarded by more than 12,000 "messages" a day from every direction (newspapers, magazines, YouTube, e-mail, spam, talk show ravers, colleagues, peers, acquaintances, passing

Jerr Boschee's column about entrepreneurial marketing is a regular monthly feature of the Social Enterprise Reporter

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Stakeholder Engagement Strategies (continued from page 4)

strangers) . . . it's amazing *any* message breaks through.

- Finally, there's the person receiving the message—somebody who has different life experiences and expertise than the sender, defines the same words in a different way, and has different blind spots.

So. The message is simple: Get to know your stakeholders. Peel

back the layers—don't settle for first impressions or initial responses. Ask questions. Listen. Listen some more. Then ask more questions. ■



Jerr Boschee has spent nearly 30 years as an advisor to social entrepreneurs in the United States and elsewhere. To date he has delivered seminars or taught master classes in 41 states and 14 countries and has long been recognized as one of the founders of the social enterprise movement worldwide. Mr. Boschee is Executive Director of The Institute for Social Entrepreneurs

➔ www.socialent.org, which he created in 1999, and is the former President and CEO of The National Center for Social Entrepreneurs. His newest book, *Boschee on Marketing*, contains 20 columns he's written for the *Social Enterprise Reporter*. Please direct your comments to ✉ jerr@orbis.net.

Diversity Recruitment and Employment (continued from page 3)

Based on the Urban League's mission, programmatic expertise and market needs, the EOI promotes six themes of revenue generation: Supplemental Education Services; Diversity Recruitment and Employment services; Business Support Services; Customized Training; Large Audience Event Management; and Affordable Housing Development.

In 2006 EOI focused on developing and strengthening affiliates in the area of Recruitment and Employment services, leveraging the League's experience in fair employment practices, workplace diversity issues and links to the African-American community. ■

Resources:

National Urban League

➔ www.NUL.org.

To learn how your company can participate in HAUL Career Connection, contact Eric Goode,

✉ ericg@haul.org.

Ettice Womble is the National Urban League's Manager of Economic Self-Sufficiency. For information about Economic Opportunity Institute trainings, contact Ms. Womble at

✉ ewomble@nul.org.

Economic Opportunity Institute Graduate: Houston Area Urban League

After completing the EOI Executive Course, Sylvia Brooks, President of the Houston Area Urban League (HAUL), reviewed and revamped their low earning career fair, Career Connection. Initially managed and coordinated by a California based event-planning company, Career Connection generated more income for the event planning company than for HAUL. Under the leadership of Carmen Watkins, Senior Vice President, and Eric Goodie, Director of Workforce Development, this signature event is now a "must-attend" for employers serious about diversity in Houston.

With nearly 100 sponsors, HAUL's career fair provides over 6,000 job seekers an opportunity to explore, apply for and secure positions in a cross section of corporate, federal, state, and local government agencies. Firms find a diverse pool of professional and entry-level candidates from a variety of industries including Engineering, Health, Service, Energy, Financial, and Government.

Complete with on-site live media coverage, Career Connection enhances HAUL's workforce development and diversity mission while simultaneously applying social enterprise principles to generate unrestricted revenue. Coinciding with Black History Month, this annual event anchors HAUL's other diversity recruitment and employment activities and nets over \$150,000.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Aperio: encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship

by Tom White

SER spoke with John Baker, Chief Executive, Aperio Canada and Warren Tranquada, CEO, Aperio US. Both have a long track record consulting to non-profit entrepreneurs, from start-ups to established organizations, in Canada and the United States.

Q: What's your perspective on the current state of social enterprise?

A: Social Enterprise is one tool among several to accomplish a goal. Many social enterprisers don't identify themselves as a social entrepreneur or as part of a movement—they're part of the arts, health or anti-poverty community. That's how they identify themselves and that's where the increased interest in social enterprise is coming from. That blend of financial and social is just smart work.

Q: How does social entrepreneurship differ in Canada?

A: The number one contextual difference between the US and Canadian nonprofit sector is the role of government in the sector. In Canada a lot of organizational decision-making is centered around government budgeting practices and public policy objectives. Much of the discussion at the recent **Second Canadian Conference on Social Enterprise** held in Vancouver, BC, involved how to engage government in this movement and change government policy to foster social enterprise. The US government hasn't been engaged to the same extent. Social Enterprise is seen as an alternative to government and people aren't talking about government as part of the solution—there's more focus on engaging philanthropists.

Q: Has there been a change in social economy initiatives with the change in the Canadian Federal Administration?

A: The Social Economy initiative was introduced late in Paul Martin's administration, but it helped to focus interest at the federal level in social enterprise. Much of that interest and funding has disappeared with the change in government. Still, HRSDC (**Human Resources and**

Social Development Canada) was a highly engaged sponsor of the CCSE (Canadian Conference on Social Enterprise). And provincial governments are making more of a commitment to social enterprise as a regional economic development tool.

Q: Does Aperio play a role in advocating for social enterprise in public policy?

A: We've been involved in the **Aspen Institute** roundtables on new legal forms and tax structures for social enterprise organizations. Our public policy work in Canada tends to be at the academic level, speaking at MBA and other graduate programs. We're driving the conversation through our work with the **Schulich School of Business at York University** and the **Maytree Foundation**.

Q: Given the current interest in social enterprise business plan competitions, have you seen a change in the quality of business planning?

A: The national nonprofit business plan competitions sponsored by the **Yale School of Management**, **Pew Charitable Trust** and **Goldman Sachs Partnership on Nonprofit Ventures** raised the bar for social enterprise. We're currently involved as judges in the **Social Entrepreneurship Track of the NYU Stern's Business Plan Competition**. When we talk to potential clients, it's a given that a business plan is a part of the social enterprise development process. They know that that is expected and the Yale Partnership had a lot to do with that.

Q: Do you see increased tension between social enterprise mission and profits?

A: It has always been our feeling that the strongest social enterprises directly advance the mission—it is always easiest when the two can co-exist. In Toronto, where we're based, the field is dominated by social purpose firms that blend affirmative action with business. We see more of that type of firm than the hardcore earned-

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Member Spotlight: Aperio

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income programs. Not-for-profit charities are earning revenue for the good work and their financial goals are tempered by that. In the US it's not always about employment, but we're seeing social enterprise as a mechanism to achieve the mission, grow the organization and increase social good. Clients are less frequently looking for a revenue source that will solve all their problems. They need a diverse funding base and we use an entrepreneurial approach to evaluate the range of funding options available to them. Earned income is just one of several tools in the mix for an income diversification strategy.

Q: Are governments or private philanthropists stepping up to help with the social enterprise capital crunch?

A: We're seeing small foundations and funds like the **Toronto Enterprise Fund** who recognize that social enterprise needs capital support. Philanthropic support is broader, and more developed in the US. **The Johns Hopkins Listening Post Project** recently sponsored a roundtable on the non-profit capital market. Their dialogue focused on how funding models are going beyond traditional approaches, more than simply philanthropic contributions. There's a new awareness of debt financing options, such as debt guarantees, as a form of philanthropy. Dialogues at the Board level now include types of financing that wouldn't have been considered a few years ago. **Vancity Credit Union** and the **Center for Social**

Innovation in Toronto are pushing the envelope in funding conversations in Canada.

Q: How is Aperio different from other consulting firms?

A: In our view, entrepreneurship is an attitude that can be built into most organizations. And we have a set of tools that can help organizations build innovation and an entrepreneurial attitude. We aren't interested in projects that develop an earned income business in a vacuum off to the side.

“We're seeing social enterprise as a mechanism to achieve the mission, grow the organization and increase social good. Clients are less frequently looking for a revenue source that will solve all their problems”.

Most consultants are drawing from the same tool set and we apply these tools in a unique way, as do our competitors. The fit with emphasis on tools, your culture and ability to work with the style of the individual consultant are significant factors when choosing a consultant.

Social Enterprise is a tool to be used within a broader organization strategy context and we want to be engaged in that broader context. We're using social enterprise to encourage change in the sector and help organizations mature. ■

Resources: Aperio recently announced the publication of second edition of their guide, *Social Sector Entrepreneurship and Innovation*. ➔ www.aperio.us



Warren Tranquada is a Partner and co-founder of Aperio. Warren has worked with over 75 organizations in the US, Canada and the UK, primarily in the areas of revenue diversification through commercial activity, strategic planning, growth planning and shared services development. Warren has an MBA from Harvard Business School (with distinction), and a Bachelor of Commerce from McGill University (with great distinction).

✉ warren.tranquada@aperio.us



John Baker is a Partner with Aperio. John works with social sector clients in the US, Canada and the UK, supporting the development of social enterprise, partnerships and venture philanthropy. John is also a lecturer/mentor for the Executive Director's Institute (Schulich School/Maytree Foundation) and an instructor in leadership and social entrepreneurship (TAPE/St Michaels College University of Toronto). He has a BA in International Studies from the Royal Military College of Canada, has attended the Banff School of Management and The Aresty Institute of Executive Education - Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. ✉ john.baker@aperio.ca

Village Enterprise Fund: Brian Lehnen, Executive Director and Co-Founder

by Tom White

The **Village Enterprise Fund** (VEF) provides small seed capital grants of \$100-\$150, along with business training and mentoring, to entrepreneurs in poor, rural areas of the East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, among the world's poorest countries. Since its inception in 1987, VEF has funded over 13,000 new privately-owned businesses and helped more than 180,000 people to improve their lives.

Founder Brian Lehnen was a biotech entrepreneur, but, thanks to his former wife Joan and involvement with his local church, he became interested in small business development as a sustainable way of providing international aid. Brian and Joan started VEF in the living room of their San Diego home with the help of friends and family. 20 years later, with the support of a more substantial board and staff, VEF's annual budget has grown to \$1,000,000.

VEF relies on donors for the bulk of its operating income. Almost 80% percent of its budget comes from individual donors, with the balance from foundations and local churches. Lehnen credits the Village Enterprise Fund's Board of Directors for its leadership in developing this donor base.

In the field, VEF identifies villagers who would be ideal candidates for its programs through its network of Volunteer Field Coordinators, who are comprised of local development workers, doctors, nurses, clergy, teachers, or Small-to-Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) owners living in the same communities as the VEF grantees. "These rural business owners and trainers are critical to VEF's success. They've helped us by identifying the social entrepreneurs in their community with heart," stated Lehnen. "And we have a long term commitment to these countries so that we can build relationships over the long term."

VEF's Volunteer Field Coordinators are trained to be trainers and mentors, providing local entrepreneurs with basic business skills, teaching vocabulary and concepts including basic bookkeeping and customer service. States Lehnen, "VEF business training is contextualized for our clients' circumstances. Trainers use local customs and beliefs to impress concepts such as preserving working capital. One trainer uses the example: 'Care for your business as you would care for a cow. You can't cut off



VEF Founder Brian Lehnen, VEF Village Field Coordinator Peter John Mudy, VEF Donor and Volunteer Susan Young, and Wilson Peru, VEF Assistant Country Director in Kenya.

the hoof and expect the cow to give milk!' Our training is generally given orally due to low literacy in rural areas, so we have no manual or workbook and most trainings are done in local languages or with an interpreter."

While VEF primarily provides grants, they have recently introduced micro-enterprise integration project loans. "The growth of rural SME's is limited by access to markets, supplies and transportation," stated Lehnen. "The goal of the loans is to provide, on a sustainable business basis, the infrastructure that our small business grantees could utilize to become more profitable."

Because the transaction costs of running loan programs are high in rural Africa, Lehnen aggressively promotes the role of micro-grants in bringing people to the first rung of the economic ladder. "Microcredit is often available in towns, but 10-20 km outside of town it's not available. Each micro-loan officer needs a minimum of 300 loans in his portfolio to be sustainable and you can't get that density in rural areas. And traditional micro-finance doesn't work well with agricultural businesses because the repayment structures aren't matched well to the production cycle. A sustainable loan portfolio is a lot more difficult in country like Tanzania, which is prone to

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Village Enterprise Fund

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frequent droughts.”

In VEF’s experience, the businesses that tend to be profitable are basic trading: buying vegetables in bulk and reselling in the marketplace, tailoring, bicycle repair, and used clothing. “Success tends to have more to do with having the right entrepreneur than with the right business model,” stated Lehnen. “There are only a limited number of successful business models.”

Two-thirds of VEF’s businesses are women-owned, and impact studies show findings similar to those of the women-owned businesses financed by Nobel Peace Prize-winning Grameen Bank: lower risk and higher benefits to family members. VEF has retained outside interns from HP and Stanford University to evaluate how their grant-funded businesses help the target audience of rural poor. Current findings of VEF funded businesses show:

- 88% continue beyond one year
- 75% are thriving four years after starting up
- 33% launch a second business

“Success tends to have more to do with having the right entrepreneur than with the right business model,” stated Lehnen. “There are only a limited number of successful business models.”

VEF is currently in a growth phase, with a goal of impacting the lives of over 100,000 new people through funding new businesses in East Africa between 2004–2008. To reach this goal and help insure the further success of their grantees, VEF will significantly increase its training programs.

“We are co-creating businesses with our grantees and field coordinators, partnering with business owners as an investor, not a banker,” stated Lehnen. “Because we’re making small grants, we share the business risks with the entrepreneur, but their success is our success.” ■

Resources:

➔ www.villageef.org

Tom White is Editor and Publisher of the *Social Enterprise Reporter*.

Restoring Art and Community

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careful with a window that will be put up for all to see. You become a caretaker for this piece of art.”

Approximately 250 people have taken a stained glass restoration class at the Union Project, with students coming from Washington State, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Virginia, Missouri, West Virginia, Ohio, and all over Pennsylvania. Tuition for weekend intensive classes is \$250. As a result of the students’ enthusiasm for the stained glass restoration classes, the Union Project has completed over two thirds of the windows in the church building, and reduced its restoration costs by over 80%. In addition, the success of the initial program has led to the establishment of **Glass Action**, a stained glass restoration social enterprise that plans to employ low-income individuals in the business of restoring stained glass.

Pittsburgh is an ideal home for a stained glass restoration business, as much of the 19th century architecture in the city contains stained glass. “Pittsburgh was founded by people with great glass-making skills, and glass was one of the major trades that built the city,” says John Stahl-Wert, one of the Union Project’s founding board members. Moreover, he says, there are over 600 churches in the region, many of which are housed in aging buildings with glass in need of restoration, but for which the costs have been prohibitive. Union Project plans to offer stained glass restoration services at a lower cost through the use of volunteers and apprentices.

Apprentices start at \$8.50 per hour with reviews at monthly increments - raising pay with competency by 25% at each review for the first



Glass Action Manager Ralph Mills and Executive Director Jessica King

year. Stated King in an e-mail, “We will probably be paying an average of \$12 per hour for a while —experienced glaziers can earn up to \$20”.

“The workforce development program will operate like an “old-fashioned” apprenticeship,” says board member Speed. “We’ll be teaching a sustainable skill to someone, just like a carpenter or a plumber. Glass Action will provide them with a good job where they can learn more than they ever could reading a book.”

The Union Project: A Center of Innovation

The old church sits at a pivotal geographical crossroads in Pittsburgh. This area, where the middle class neighborhood of Highland Park meets East Liberty, has struggled with poverty in the last several decades.

As President and Chief Executive Officer of the **Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation**, Stahl-

Wert has always had a deep commitment to community revitalization and has been an innovator in creating programs to encourage leadership and community involvement from individuals of all ages and backgrounds. In 1994, Stahl-Wert founded the **Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Experience (PULSE)**, a program designed to bring recent college graduates to Pittsburgh pairing them with positions in community organizations. Union Project Executive Director Jessica King was recruited into the PULSE program in 1997, and with Stahl-Wert they conceived of the idea of creating an innovative organization that would “turn geography into community.” Once King attached PULSE to the Union Baptist Church building, a center of innovation was born.

The Union Project leadership has focused its energies on supporting its community-building efforts through

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Restoring Art and Community

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diverse revenue generating programs that directly contribute to its mission. Besides the Glass Action enterprise, the Union Project, a (501c3) non-profit, has three other major programs in place. **The Urban Fusion Café & Catering** opened in August 2006 and provides a central meeting place for community members. In addition, it employs students from nearby **Peabody High School's** culinary arts program, and donates 5% of its profits to a scholarship fund for Urban Fusion employees. The Union Project also has a space rental business, with office space for long-term lease, as well as the board room and the great hall (formerly the church sanctuary) for event rental. Most recently, they have created a ceramics venture that offers classes for all levels, as well as a cooperative membership for skilled artisans. This year's annual budget is approximately \$900,000, of which \$100,000 in sales revenue was budgeted for Glass Action.

Much of the organization's success is because of King's dynamic leadership. "Jessica is a magnet - she's an entrepreneur that puts ideas, people and resources together to make things happen," says Stahl-Wert. King recently announced that she would be stepping down from her position as Executive Director in May 2007, and the search is underway for her replacement. "It's a mixed bag," says King, "but I feel like it's the right time." Stahl-Wert, although reluctant to see her go, says that the Union Project has exceeded expectations under King's leadership, but that it has now transitioned from an entrepreneurial seedling to a stable organization focused on implementation and operations, and is ready for

new leadership to take it to the next phase.



Omar McDonald is an apprentice with the Glass Action program.

The Union Project has become a model in Pittsburgh for successful community engagement, and has received continuously strong support from community members, politicians, funders, and other nonprofits. In particular, Associate Director Justin Rothshank can be credited with bringing together much of the base of support for the Union Project's programs. "Justin brought both skills and expertise in the components of the traditional Mennonite barn raising effort," says King. "After a year we had 2,500 volunteers who contributed 25,000 man hours to the church renovations. This gave us strong community support which allowed us to find an audience for the stained glass classes, as well as grow the other programs."

Many see the potential of this entrepreneurial model for other struggling communities.

John Fetterman, mayor of nearby Braddock, PA, came to the Union Project to take a stained glass class and examine their business. "I'm not sure the exact same model would work in Braddock, because [the Union Project]'s neighborhood has more social capital," says Fetterman. "However, there are many aspects of the Union Project model that are transferable." Fetterman himself bought a dilapidated church in Braddock in 2001. Five years later, he uses the space to house a performance venue, an art gallery, to host church congregations and children's summer camps. Fetterman's goal for the church is ultimately to house a youth center that will provide a geographic magnet to get kids off the streets. "The Union Project is a powerful model," he says, "if for no other reason, because funders and others can visibly see the progress that has been made, and perhaps it can be 'franchised' to other communities in need."

Glass Action: The Evolving Venture

As the Union Project moves from its inception to a phase of steady growth, the Glass Action program has evolved as well. In January 2007, Ralph Mills was hired as the full time Glass Action Manager. A skilled stained glass craftsman since 1981, Mills opened **Glassworks Studios** in 1988 and then went on to manage **Stained Glass Resources** in Carnegie, PA in 2000. His new job entails professionalizing the Glass Action enterprise, setting up and managing the in-house studio, bidding and contracting jobs, and hiring and training up to three employee apprentices at a time.

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Restoring Art and Community

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Glass Action advertised locally to find members of special populations to fill the apprenticeship spots. “We’ve already hired one individual who is an ex-offender,” says Mills. “The most important thing we are looking for in a person is a commitment to recovery and work excellence.” The additional full-time apprentices will allow the Union Project to complete restoration on the remaining third of their stained glass much more quickly than the first part of the project.

“Glass Action charges approximately \$70 per square foot of glass - which is about half the average going rate,” stated King. “Because windows vary in complexity and condition so much, each job is individually bid, but our goal is to provide restoration services for approximately half the market rate.”

There are a number of local organizations that have expressed interest in Glass Action’s restoration services. As Mills points out, Pittsburgh is not the limit of possibility for business. There are hundreds of quaint small towns in Western Pennsylvania built before the 1930’s that have buildings containing stained glass in need of repair or restoration. In addi-

tion, Glass Action is partnering with the Pittsburgh History & Landmark Foundation to reach the hundreds of organizations in their membership who need restoration services.



The Union Project Church

Glass Action will also continue to offer stained glass classes. “We don’t have a choice,” states Mills. “I’m already getting a large number of e-mails and calls from potential students.” But as always, the true value of all of Union Project’s programs is their community impact. As King says, “We’re providing jobs and giving people a second chance. We’re providing learning and service opportunities to community members. We’re cleaning up glass around the city. And we’re doing it as a self-sustaining organization. That’s the kind of impact we want to have.” ■

Resources:

➔ www.unionproject.org

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➔ <http://db.olszak.com>

✉ ksphar@olszak.com

National Offender Workforce Development Conference
April 2–5, Charlotte, NC

➔ www.proworkdev.com

Social Entrepreneurship Pipeline: Educating and Accelerating Emerging Social Entrepreneurs

April 12–13, Stern School of Business, New York University
Sponsored by the Berkley Center for Entrepreneurial Studies Fourth Annual Conference of Social Entrepreneurs

➔ http://w4.stern.nyu.edu/berkley/social.cfm?doc_id=1868

Global Social Venture Competition

Social Enterprise Symposium
April 14, UC Berkeley CA

➔ <http://socialvc.net>

National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals Annual Conference

April 16–19, Philadelphia PA

➔ <http://nacdep.net/confs/2007/Conference.htm>

Social Enterprise Alliance, 8th Gathering

April 17–19, 2007 Long Beach, CA

➔ www.se-alliance.org

Bring It Home: Building Communities on a Rock Foundation 2007 National Community Economic Development

April 18–21, 2007, St. John's NL

➔ www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/conference_07.asp

Exploring Innovation: A Conference on Community Development Finance

May 2–4, St. Louis, MO

➔ www.stlouisfed.org/community/innovation/

California Association for Local Economic Development Annual Conference & Spring Training:

Bringing Innovation & Leadership to Local Economic Development
May 2–4, Monterey, CA

➔ http://caled.org/2007_conference_info.shtml

LOHAS 11 Forum

May 14–16, Los Angeles, CA

➔ www.lohas.com

Association for Enterprise Opportunity Annual Conference

Microenterprise Development: The Rhythm of Successful Communities
May 15–18, Kansas City, MO

➔ www.microenterpriseworks.org/index.asp?bid=219

NonprofitCenters Network National Conference:

Collaborating for Success

May 16–18, San Francisco CA

➔ www.nonprofitcenters.org/events/

Cause Marketing Forum Conference

May 16–18, NYC

<http://causemarketingforum.com/conference.asp>

Pratt Center for Community Development's ABCs of Community Development

May 17, 24 and 31, Pratt Institute Manhattan Center, NY

In partnership with the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development

➔ www.prattcenter.net/events

National Association of Workforce Development Professionals

May 20–23, Reno NV

➔ www.nawdp.org/conference.htm

The Investors' Circle Spring Conference & Venture Fair

May 22–24, San Francisco CA

➔ www.investorscircle.net/index.php?tg=articles&topics=134

E.F. Schumacher Society: Building Sustainable Local Economies

May 23–27, Great Barrington, MA

➔ www.schumachersociety.org

Community College National Center for Community Engagement Annual Conference

Meeting the Challenge of Sustainability for the 21st Century

May 23–25, Scottsdale, AZ

➔ www.mc.maricopa.edu/other/engagement/2007Conf/ConfInfo.jsp

Annual Business Alliance for Local Living Economies Conference

May 31–June 2, University of California, Berkeley CA

➔ www.livingeconomies.org/events/conference07

Energizing Entrepreneurship in Rural America National Institute

June 5–8 Nebraska City, NE

➔ www.energizingentrepreneurs.org

Community Development Society and National Rural Development Partnership Annual Conference

June 17–20, Appleton, WI

➔ www.comm-dev.org

Alliance for Nonprofit Management Annual Meeting

July 18–20, Atlanta, GA

➔ www.allianceonline.org

International Economic Development Council: Economic Development in the 21st Century: New Leadership, New Models

September 16–19, Phoenix AZ

➔ www.iedconline.org/AnnualConference