My Benesch My Team Campaign – Alvis House

JANUARY 1, 2013

Alvis House, founded in 1967, is a not-for-profit operating programs in Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Lima and Chillicothe, OH. The agency's mission is "to serve communities by providing research-based programs and services that promote healthier families, personal responsibility and public safety." Alvis House provides direct services to more than 4,000 men, women, young adults and children each year, and impacts tens of thousands more.

Below is a testimonial from Denise Robinson, President & CEO of Alvis House.

How did Alvis House get started?
Reverend David Dunning, an Episcopal priest, was a chaplain at the Ohio Penitentiary and often had clients come to him and say they had no place to go once they left prison. So he got together with other business leaders in Columbus, got a small loan to buy a house and put together the agency. It is named in honor of a former warden of the Ohio Penitentiary, Ralph Alvis, who was always willing to help inmates once they got out.

How did your relationship with Benesch begin?
Marty Sweterlitsch has been our counsel since the mid-'80s. Our relationship with Benesch began in 2001 when Marty joined the firm. I've been here for 26 years, and when Marty moved to Benesch, my fear was that because she was now working for a large law firm, she might forget about our not-for-profit. But it was nothing like that; in fact, it was the complete opposite.

I really like the way we work in teams. Benesch has many resources, and it's nice to be able to easily get someone on the phone in Cleveland or any of the other Benesch offices to assist with a particular issue. It's really interesting, too, because a lot of people don't know our business, so having Marty as our point person has always been very nice. For example, when we talk to an employment attorney or someone helping with a property issue, and they already know about us because Marty has filled them in.

What kinds of things does Benesch help you with?
Everything. Benesch has a wide range of experts, always willing to listen to our needs. They always look at the best way to advise us. Most recently, Benesch helped us navigate a myriad of issues surrounding the purchase of the facility we're in now for our new administrative offices and outpatient counseling services. They also worked with us to obtain the best possible financing for the project and took us through the bond process as well as looking at other issues surrounding the purchase of the property. Especially with the bond financing, it saves the agency thousands of dollars that we can now use to provide more services to our clients.

We always like being able to talk with Benesch because they really care. They realize we're a human services organization. A lot of times, people think, "Oh they're just dealing with former offenders."

We never got that feeling with Benesch. What sets Benesch apart from other firms is that fact that they're real people. Everyone I've met…every attorney, every partner…they really care about what we're doing. That's how I feel.

Do you face unique challenges as a nonprofit or are you dealing with the same things any business deals with?
I think we face the same challenges, but we are unique in that our business is about making people better instead of making a better product. The responsibility that weighs on me most is being accountable to the clients we serve. Our logo says 'Opening Doors, Rebuilding Lives,' and I personally feel like I have to be able to answer 'yes' that we really are helping people do just that. I lose a lot of sleep over that.

Especially with the economic downturn and government revenues being down, it's been tough for us because most of our funding is from government contracts. So far we haven't faced huge cuts, but we've been flat-lined for several years, which is challenging in itself. Another challenge is that we're dealing with the families of former offenders-spouses, significant others, children-who have also been affected by the economy. People don't think of Alvis House as that, but we're truly a family-oriented organization.

Do you have plans for the future for Alvis House?
We've more than doubled in business in the last 5 years, so we're looking at trying to enhance things rather than grow. One area I'm focusing on is our programs for people with developmental disabilities. I also want to make sure we're able to provide services that are not the traditional halfway house programs-the residential side that most people think of. Our clients need things like day treatment and therapy that we provide because we wouldn't meet their needs or the needs of the community otherwise.

DISCLAIMER: Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff LLP cannot and does not guarantee similar or any particular results. Every case or other legal matter is different, and past results afford no guarantee of future results. Clients have volunteered their respective testimonials and have given Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff LLP permission to use their testimonials.