HEART OF THE 'HOOD

Cabrini Connections President prepared to turn loan into gift

Dan Bassill is not a rich man, and he has two small children to support. Bassill — president of Cabrini Connections, a tutor/mentor organization for the seventh- to twelfth-grade kids of Cabrini Green — is also not a man who can afford to shell out somewhere around $100,000 for children other than his own.

Throughout the past three years though, Bassill has loaned Cabrini Connections, 800 W. Huron St., about that much money, to “cover rent or payroll when we had deficits of cash flow.” Besides that amount, Cabrini Connections is currently three months behind on rent to the tune of $13,000.

There are two ways you can help.

The first and cheapest way is to attend Harvest in the Park, a fund-raiser this Saturday, Nov. 8, at Noble Horse, 1410 N. Orleans St. For $60 (in advance), $75 at the door, you get dinner, a horse show and a post-show acoustic music performance, a horse-drawn hayride through Lincoln Park, refreshments, caramel apples, and s’mores. If the event draws 300 people, it will raise the more than $13,000 needed for overdue rent, Bassill says.

“The Harvest in the Park is one way to help raise money that is urgently needed,” Bassill told me. “However, over the next eight weeks, many people will be making decisions on holiday giving and on end-of-year tax-deferment decisions. The stock market went up 10 percent for many people this year, and some of those people could make a stock donation to us and get the benefit of the full value of the stock as a tax deduction.”

By Felicia Dechter

Skyline

Lerner Skyline — November 6, 2003

“Some of your readers are in the tax category where this would be a smart financial decision. We just need them to think of Cabrini Connections as they are making their financial plans.”

Which leads me to the other way you can help.

Bassill is willing to write-off $60,000 of Cabrini Connections’ debt to him, if donors can be found to match this with contributions of $5,000 and $10,000 each.

Let me repeat that.

Dan Bassill will write off up to $60,000 in matched donations of $5,000 and $10,000 each.

“We need to raise money for general operations so we don’t incur future debt, and we need to raise money to pay the rent and lower past debt,” he said. “I’m not a rich person, and I’ve two small kids at home. However, I feel that the work Cabrini Connections does helps my kids by making life richer for kids living in poverty. I also feel that the Tutor/Mentor Connection is a strategy that needs to be in place in every major city so that there are more programs for more kids.”

“I just received a call from a father who was desperate to get his 16-year-old son in a tutor/mentor program. It’s frustrating to say we don’t have space, and know we may not be here much longer, and to know that there are not a lot of good programs out there to serve his son.”

“We’ve reduced expenses, yet we keep finding more donors who won’t fund us, either because they think Cabrini Green no longer has kids who need this type of program (not true), or because they look at our growing debt and don’t want to give money that might reduce debt, or they just don’t have enough money because of the recession or of giving to new areas such as homeland security, disaster relief, or overseas needs.”

Bassill — who left a higher-paying job at Wards in 1990 to lead Cabrini Connections — says new research shows that huge numbers of youth 16 to 24 have left high school, lack credentials and are unemployed or essentially unemployable without interventions such as job training and placement. Or, places such as Cabrini Connections.

“Our job is to do good work,” Bassill said. “We need donors who want the same results as we’re trying to achieve, and see their job as providing the resources we need.”

“Unfortunately, we’ve not been finding enough donors who are willing to say, ‘If it is to be, it is up to me,’ and demonstrate that commitment with their actions and their donations.”

For more info call Cabrini Connections, (312) 492-9795 or e-mail tutor/mentor2@earthlink.net.