

PARTNERING WITH NONPROFIT\$

BY LOGAN ANGEL

IN A WORLD WHERE TECHNOLOGY RULES, COMPANIES ARE FINDING IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO STAY IN TUNE WITH THE CHANGING TIMES. Nonprofit organizations are no exception and often have the additional challenge of a limited operational budget. Without the guidance and support of a sometimes costly IT consultant or IT director, nonprofits may fall victim to lengthy manual processes, system setbacks and system failures.

This is a problem for many nonprofits in Waco, Texas. After years of wanting to help but not having the resources, Gina Green, associate professor of Management Information Systems (MIS), and Erica Ancira, technology consultant for the Nonprofit Technology Collaboration and visiting lecturer at Baylor, have teamed up to offer a solution.

A resident of Waco for the past 14 years, Green has done her fair share of volunteer work and said that she has always had "a heart for service."

"I knew there was a need for better information management in Waco nonprofits and that I had the knowledge to help, but it takes more than just an idea to put something into action," she said.

In 2007, Green had a graduate student working on an independent study who was interested in helping nonprofit organizations make sense of their data.

"Some tools were developed, but it was on more of a small scale," Green said.

In spring of 2010, though, Green's idea started to take shape when she attended a nonprofit technology conference in Austin. Ironically, due to a technological glitch by the conference organizers, she was given ample time to introduce herself to another woman who was attending, Erica Ancira. At the time, Ancira served as the director of Technology and Administration for the Waco Foundation. **THE TWO BEGAN DISCUSSING THEIR PASSION FOR TECHNOLOGY AND VOLUNTEER WORK, AND SOON REALIZED THEIR MISSING PUZZLE PIECES WERE EACH OTHER.**

CARITAS

COMMUNITIES IN
SCHOOLS OF THE
HEART OF TEXAS

COMPASSION
MINISTRIES

WACO HABITAT FOR
HUMANITY

FAMILY ABUSE
CENTER

MEALS & WHEELS
(CENTRAL TEXAS
SENIOR MINISTRY)

WORLD HUNGER
RELIEF

“OUR PRIMARY GOAL IS TO EQUIP NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS WITH TECHNOLOGY TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES THAT WILL ENABLE THEM TO MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SUPPORTING THEIR MISSIONS.”

"Starting back in 2009, I began brainstorming ways I could use my IT knowledge to help nonprofits in Waco, but just didn't have all the resources," Ancira said. "When Dr. Green and I met at that conference, we knew we could make something happen."

Through the Waco Foundation, Ancira then identified seven different local nonprofit organizations that would be good initial candidates for technological aid. All that was needed then was an intern.

So in 2011, Green put out an application among MIS students, looking for the very first nonprofit intern for the program, beginning in the fall semester. After an interview and discussion of skill sets, Doug Kimball, BBA '12, was selected for the position, and the Nonprofit Technology Internship Program was established.

Kimball had his hands full in fall of 2011, starting off his internship by teaming up with a local consultant to do a complete IT assessment of the seven nonprofit organizations, which the program refers to as the "Leader's Circle." Once all the strengths and weaknesses were assessed for each nonprofit organization, Kimball was responsible for offering technology suggestions that would help benefit the productivity of the different organizations' missions.

"The process was very lengthy, but the Leader's Circle was really pleased and grateful," Green said. "Shortly after, they started to implement suggestions that were made."

In addition to the IT assessment task, Kimball was asked to look into possible work opportunities for future interns of the program.

"After the initial assessment, all of the organizations in the Leader's Circle expressed the need for assistance in the basics of technology and how to use technology more effectively," Green said. And thus, the idea was born to create a technology basics manual, a project so extensive that it is still in the works at the present moment.

Nicholas Villapana, BBA '12, had the honor of tackling this daunting task as the program intern this past spring semester.

"I had to go back to basics with this assignment, creating easy-to-follow steps and using screenshots to outline how to use certain programs such as Microsoft Word and Excel," Villapana said. "It was a tedious task, but it helped as a refresher over the basics. I learned some new information about programs and shortcuts that I was not aware of before. It also gave me work experience to add to my résumé that stood out to employers when I was interviewing for jobs."

Ericson Sampson, senior MIS major and summer 2012 intern, felt similarly about having this opportunity.

"I was having a difficult time finding an internship for the summer until one of my professors suggested contacting Dr. Green," Sampson said. "After meeting with her about my skills and interests, I was soon on my way to picking up where Nicholas left off on the technology basics manual. I'm eager to learn new things, help out where I can and get the kind of experience needed to enter the job field upon graduation."

Mark Cummings, senior MIS major and summer 2012 intern, was told about the internship by Doug Kimball. And continuing in his footsteps, Cummings worked on a survey that Kimball started, which was made available in August. The survey is intended to be a method of assessing the technology needs of a broader group of Waco-based nonprofits.

"FIRST AND FOREMOST WE WANT TO SERVE," GREEN SAID. "WE ARE FOCUSING ON THE IDEA OF 'SERVICE LEARNING' — HELPING STUDENTS ENHANCE THEIR IT AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS BY SERVING IN THE COMMUNITY."

Ancira is pleased with the program so far and looks forward to its expansion.

"This is a work in progress, but it feels good to have something to show for all the hard work that has been done," Ancira said. "The Leader's Circle is so very appreciative for all the time and effort that the interns have given. It is our hope that in the near future we will be able to help more nonprofit organizations and bring more interns on board."

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