



Decatur Heritage Christian Academy

Decatur, AL

Scott Mayo, Headmaster

Project Summary

As a young school, Decatur Heritage did not have a rich tradition of development. The establishment of a formal development office was going to be a necessary step to manage and grow fundraising capability.

The primary goals of this project were to:

- Keep Track - set up a computerized development database
- Keep in Touch - promulgate a development activity calendar
- Keep Abreast - hire a development professional to oversee the functioning of the office

Established in 1995, DHCA is a non-denominational school serving 350 students representing over 40 area churches in the greater Decatur area.

Project Results

Timing was opportune for these initiatives in that the school was entering its first-ever capital campaign and was hoping to capitalize on the resultant energy, information, and expertise. During the course of the campaign, many personal meetings were held with constituents, much information was gathered, and several key volunteers stepped forward, all under the wise counsel of the campaign consultants. Subsequently, through the executive planning committee of the campaign, we:

- Chose and have begun to utilize the Donations application of FileMaker Pro, our current school database program. By going this route, development-specific data will be added to existing census information, thereby speeding implementation and usefulness.
- Adopted a development calendar focusing on increasing personal and written contact with donors and the general constituency. The calendar calls for increased printing, postage, and promotion line items in the budget.
- Produced a job description and a package for a Director of Development. During the course of the campaign, we were not able to identify a candidate internally and were pessimistic about the prospect of attracting outside talent given salary constraints. We will continue to consider the situation and desire to make a hire when the right individual arises.



What We Have Learned

We "know" that there are three components to development - an art, a science, and God. I learned that the science part (database, calendar, budget) is very important and that it is normally foolish (and arrogant) to assume you can operate without generally following the textbooks. However, all the science of fundraising cannot overcome a lack of the "art" side of it. The right people in the right situations with the right gifts, talents, desires, and motivations have to be involved in the process. Without this, any development plan could be subject to becoming mechanistic (at best) or manipulative (at worst). We have overcome a lack of existing structure and history this year because we have had the right folks involved. As we have progressed, of course we have added structure and followed the advice of the experts when possible. What we have been able to do, though, is keep our eyes on the fact that this is about people, not money.

The "God" element is where God steps in and honors some of the right things we did (the science) and the right hearts we had (the art). However, He also moves in totally unexpected ways, often in spite of our people, our efforts, and our systems. As we near the end of the campaign, we looked back at our feasibility studies. The first (two years ago) showed a potential of \$2 million. That was \$1.9 million more than we had ever raised before. At the actual start of the campaign (11 months ago), the updated study showed a \$3.4 million potential. To date, we have raised \$6.5 million and can see another \$500,000 still on the horizon. Even with all the right structure and all the right people, that is just not humanly possible.

Yes, development is an art - you need the right people, the fundraising artists. Yes, it is a science - there are things that ought to be in place and ways you should structure things. As is true in all of life, though, you ignore the God element to your peril. He is so good and truly supplies the needs of His people.

