

Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Omnipresent agencies felt far and wide

Today, Barry VanderKelen makes his debut as *The Tribune's Nonprofit Strategies* columnist.

VanderKelen is executive director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation, replacing Dave Edwards who left that post last fall. VanderKelen has worked in the nonprofit industry for more than 25 years, most recently as a consultant for nonprofits in the Bay Area. He's also taught classes on philanthropy and nonprofit management at St. Mary's College and Loyola Marymount University. This column represents the return of a bimonthly focus on the nonprofit sector in San Luis Obispo County. Why focus on the nonprofit sector? In our county, charitable organizations employ more than 2,700 people. A conservative estimate is that an additional 20,000 people volunteer their time and talent to these organizations, which provided more than 1.6 million services in 2005. Another way to look at this last statistic is that last year every county resident benefited from nonprofit services at least four times. Clearly, the size of the sector and its impact are worthy of our attention.

Another reason to focus on the nonprofit sector is its scope. San Luis Obispo County's community-based philanthropic organizations cover everything from the arts to zoos.

Seemingly every aspect of life is supported by nonprofits. There are more than 1,000 in the county, and no two are alike. Exploring the sector can help reduce the confusion its complexity creates.

Inspired by good works

Why am I interested in nonprofits? Like many of you, I have experienced the fulfillment one receives from helping another person. And I believe in the need to help others because throughout my life I have been helped so much. The kindness of strangers is part of the fabric of our society.

Since 1981, I have spent my career working with nonprofit organizations. Either as a staff member, a volunteer or a consultant, I have helped many organizations, large and small. I have raised hundreds of millions of dollars, and recruited and managed hundreds of volunteers. I have seen highly functioning organizations as well as dysfunctional ones. In each and every case, I am inspired by the commitment to meeting a community need by those involved.

I have come to believe a few

things, including:

- Nonprofits are not forprofits — the purpose is different. Having said that:
 - The nonprofit model needs to evolve — organizations need to reimagine their "business" models, and the general public needs to revisit their assumptions about how nonprofits do their work.
 - Nonprofits are their own worst enemies. The passion of the founder or a core group, that gives the organization energy, must be focused and directed; too many times the passion overrules sound operating principles.
 - Demographic and economic trends indicate that there will be even more charitable organizations being created. Two things to consider: retiring Baby Boomers and federal and state government budget deficits.
- This column will offer tips and advice on issues great and small. I'll try to keep my finger on the sector's pulse. I will rely on local experts for insights and guidance. Last, this column cannot exist in a vacuum; therefore, I welcome your questions and comments.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other Tuesday in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.

