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Nonprofit News

Hospitality House of Charlotte tells its story

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When guests check in at Hospitality House, they are greeted by a volunteer and get a quick rundown of the services at the nonprofit shelter for families of patients at Charlotte-area hospitals. They also learn it costs the nonprofit \$60 to put them up at no charge for the night, and that they will be expected to handle a chore such as sweeping the front porch or taking out the garbage.

“They may or may not be able to give money, but they can always give time,” says Kimberly Melton, executive director of Hospitality House. And giving time can lead to an increase in contributions, she says.

Communicating the story of Hospitality House to families and the community is a top priority for Melton, who joined the organization in July 2008 after a career in marketing and management.

Marketing is part of a larger effort to streamline operations and institute business practices she learned in the for-profit world. “We run our organization like a business,” Melton says.

Hospitality House was formed in 1985 in response to a study three years earlier by the Mecklenburg Medical Alliance and Endowment that found out-of-town families visiting relatives in local hospitals often couldn’t find an affordable place to spend the night nearby. Initially operating as a 14-bed facility in a former house it owned on Scott Avenue, Hospitality House in 1996 added 15 beds in a wing of St. John’s Baptist Church.

And last year, Hospitality House opened a 22-bedroom facility at 1400 Scott Ave. that can sleep 50 guests a night.

Despite doubling its total beds, the nonprofit is full every night and has a waiting list. That reflects the fact that the facility is the only one of its kind in Charlotte and serves eight hospitals.

Hospitality House also faces a financial crunch because of the recession. While its budget has nearly doubled to \$416,000, foundation support is down 40%. And corporate support has plunged 90%.

So Hospitality House is ramping up its fund raising and communications.

The group has hired veteran fund-raiser Susan Ross as its development director. She aims to boost the group’s annual campaign and develop a planned-giving program to increase its \$1.2 million endowment.

And on Sept. 29, the group will host a fund-raising breakfast featuring Michael Tarwater, chief executive of Carolinas HealthCare System.

To better tell its story, Hospitality House has launched an e-newsletter and created a speakers bureau.

“I call us the ‘unknown nonprofit of Charlotte,’” Melton says. “My theme this year is communication.”

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