

Today

■ What a gem!

Davy Jones of the Monkees talks about future Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Neil Diamond. **3D**

Saturday, December 18, 2010 » MC



ALEX BOERNER/TREASURE COAST NEWS

Boys and Girls Clubs of Martin County Communications Director Suzanne Wentley, left, reacts as Jonathan Montelongo, 15, of Indiantown, opens the case of trombone he received as a gift at the clubs' Indiantown Branch. Wentley raised \$150 toward the trombone by using her Facebook account to put out a request for donations. Carlyle Weber, owner of The Band Box, provided the instrument, donating the balance of the cost for the trombone and the accessories.

“It’s free, so a lot of businesses and nonprofits like the idea of it, but you have to have the time. You want to be strategic about what you’re doing.”

Jessica Layne, social networking “guru” at The Firefly Group

Charity begins on Facebook

More nonprofits are using social networking to reach out to community.

By Kim Hughes

Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers

Rob Ranieri, a board member of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Martin County, credits Facebook with helping him connect with a man in Stone Mountain, Ga., who runs a chess program for at-risk youths with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta. They’re now discussing a partnership.

Facebook also was the tool Suzanne Wentley, communications director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Martin County, used to raise money for a student who no longer could pursue his passion — the trombone — because he had no instrument. Generous supporters provided funds to purchase one for him through The Band Box in Stuart.

Although it initially started out as a tool to connect college students, Facebook now is a popular means of communicating for all ages.

And nonprofit organizations are finding social networking, especially Facebook, a budget-friendly way to share news and request help.

“It’s free, so a lot of businesses and nonprofits like the idea of it, but you have to have the time,” said Jessica Layne, the social networking “guru” at The Firefly Group who also manages the Keep Martin Beautiful Facebook account. “You want to be strategic about what you’re doing.”

For Sonya Morrison, executive director at The Source in Vero Beach, social networking allows supporters to “experience a different level of engagement that’s fun and rewarding at the same time.”

When The Source has cold-weather needs, such as food or clothing, the first responses always come from Facebook. That kind of immediate support helps build a sense of community, Morrison said.

House of Hope, a Stuart-based charity, has used Facebook and Twitter for the past year. In addition to reaching supporters, communications director Diane Tomasik said, many members of the media are Facebook “friends,” which helps the organization’s mission.

“They’re aware there’s constant activity at our agency,” Tomasik said. “The whole social networking medium is another tool in the tool kit to reach out to people, particularly younger people.”

Some nonprofit agencies have found that social networking — Facebook in particular — is the best way to get a new generation involved. Justin Beard, the communications and marketing director for United Way of Martin County, is using Facebook to encourage local high school students to get involved in Martin Volunteers.

Facebook, Beard said, is “the easiest way to get hold of those kids.”

LOCAL NONPROFITS ON FACEBOOK

Keep Martin Beautiful: Promoted its International Coastal Cleanup. Facebook users could register online and select a preferred cleanup site. Facebook also provided them with status updates on the number of volunteers and sponsors. At least a dozen groups, each with five to 20 people, used the social networking site for registration purposes.

The Source in Vero Beach: Posts immediate needs. Response from a recent posting paid to have a broken bulb in a flat-screen TV replaced quickly.

House of Hope in Stuart: Sends out requests when supplies run low in the food pantry. A quick post can yield responses from individuals willing to drop off needed food items.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Martin County: Promoted a food drive in November, which featured an “adults vs. kids” challenge; secured a trombone for a local teenager wanting to pursue music.

H.A.N.D.S. of St. Lucie County: Posts updates about services and other organizations that might offer help.

United Way of Martin County: Recruited volunteers for the organization’s Sept. 11 National Day of Service, which consisted of 14 projects at local nonprofits throughout Martin County.