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Utah's charitable foundations

Charity report: Nonprofits turn to individuals to keep afloat

By Kristen Moulton
The Salt Lake Tribune

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Ogden » Sally and Bob Neill canceled a fishing trip to South America a few months ago, even though it meant losing their deposit.

They also will forego a foreign bicycle tour, and will put off remodeling their Ogden home this year.

"We're entering the age of restraint," Sally Neill says.

The reason for the retired couple's frugality? Not only are their investments hurting, nonprofits they care about need them now more than ever.

People such as the Neills, who are adjusting their lifestyles so they can continue -- or increase -- support for community nonprofits, are now seen as the nonprofit world's salvation.

Just as during the Great Depression, when Americans



Sally and Bob Neill, long time supporters of the Ogden Nature Center, have cut back their personal spending to continue helping their favorite non-profits. (Leah Hogsten/ The Salt Lake Tribune)

grandparent-led families.

A number of Utah nonprofits find reason for hope.

The Greater Salt Lake Chapter of the American Red Cross had more people than usual at its annual Heroes fund-raiser in March, and it made more money.

"Especially in bad times, people realize how important our services are," spokeswoman Susan Thomas says.

Weber Pathways, which builds and maintains trails in Weber County, raised more money than

ever in its annual campaign in November, and its March author event turned a bigger profit than expected.

"People are realizing that if we don't do it, nobody else will," says Neill, who is on Pathways' executive committee. She and Bob also support the Ogden Nature Center and have been donating cash to the Salvation Army and other social service agencies in lieu of family gifts.

Individual donors continue to support food drives for Utah's food pantries, including an emergency one in February.

And Jim Pugh, Utah Food Bank executive director, says the new online food drive has been "hugely successful," particularly among young, first-time donors.

Such donations are not only efficient -- they let

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Eleisha Hewes has been a member at the Alliance House for... (Chris Detrick/The Salt Lake Tribune)

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food banks buy in bulk and save on transportation -- but allow companies, community groups and churches to engage in friendly competitions tracked online.

"People are looking out for their neighbors a little more than in the past," Pugh says.

It's going to take a lot of neighbors, though.

Ross Peterson, Utah State University vice president for university advancement, said individual gifts are up 8 percent from last year. But foundation gifts are down as much as 60 percent.

For at least a few more years to come, Peterson said, USU won't be expecting gifts such as the \$25 million it got in 2007 from the Emma Eccles Jones Foundation.

"It's not going to be an easy time," Peterson said. "That's just a reality for us right now."

It won't stop the school from trying. USU has focused some of its fundraising on social networking sites such as Facebook, hoping to encourage small donations now and nurture larger ones down the road.

"If people respond with \$100 or \$200 right now, well that's just huge to us," Peterson says.

Recognizing how important individual generosity can be, nonprofits are pinning their hopes on it.

Alliance House, which provides psycho-social rehabilitation for the mentally ill, began to focus on individual donors two years ago.

As a result, the nonprofit, which serves up to 300 people each day, has reduced its dependence on foundations from 75 percent to 40 percent of its budget, development director Karen Wildfoerster says.

One way Alliance House has found new donors: weekly tours of the clubhouse-style agency.

"It's a one-person-at-a-time sort of thing," Wildfoerster says. "People will give to what they have a personal contact with."

South Valley Boys & Girls Club shares that thinking. Members have been going door to door this spring to raise money so the club doesn't have to keep restricted hours.

Some worry today's level of giving may not last.

Says Pugh at the Utah Food Bank: "As generous as everybody is, the longer these economic challenges are here, the harder it is for people to dig deeper."

Reporter **Matthew D. LaPlante** contributed to this story.


What you can do

Even small donations of money and time add up.

In fact, more than 82 percent of all charitable giving was from individuals in 2007, according to Giving USA Foundation.

To find nonprofits you want to support, go to http://www.utahlinks.net/Utah_Non_Profits.htm or <http://www.utahnonprofits.org>.

To find volunteer opportunities, start at the state's Commission on Volunteers Web site, <http://volunteers.utah.gov> and follow the link to Program Initiatives.

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