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STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Gary Dembs spends countless hours creating public relations campaigns for non-profit organizations. His company, Public Image, was founded to assist groups that cannot afford help from large public relations companies.

## Public relations counselor attracts non-profit clients

By R.J. King  
special writer

Three years ago a young public relations specialist in Southfield noticed a phenomenon: the number of agencies in town targeted exclusively to non-profit organizations was zero.

Curious, Gary Dembs began surveying charitable groups and found most had limited budgets and could not afford the high cost of public relations counsel, often \$100 per hour for a seasoned account executive.

Dembs further learned promoting a worthy cause either was done by volunteers, or if a non-profit organization was lucky, an agency agreed to handle the account at cost — though usually for just one year.

"I guess I just got tired of pushing pickles, pop and pizza and decided to do something for non-profit," Dembs said.

HIS ANSWER to the vacuum was opening The Public Image in Birmingham.

Before striking out on his own, Dembs said charitable groups often talked firms into promoting a worthy cause at cost but, since most of these arrangements last for just one year, there was no sense of continuity.

A 10-year public relations veteran, Dembs maintains that in an aggressive marketplace, a muddled message often leads to poor performance.

"Everyone looks for a unique selling point and, if it's not there every year on a consistent basis, it gets lost."

But beyond a dire need for a public relations agency targeted exclusively to non-profit organizations, Dembs attributed the inspiration for his one-man show to popular singer Bruce Springsteen.

In 1985, as one condition of his world tour to support the album "Born to Run," Springsteen donated \$10,000 to the fight against hunger in each city where he performed.

WORKING FOR a public relations firm in Southfield at the time, Dembs helped to arrange for Springsteen to meet with the Food

Bank of Oakland County and present a donation.

"I was struck by Springsteen's charity, but it was really one of his songs about home towns, where he sings about what one person can do to help others who are struggling, that led me to open Public Image."

With 17 clients, among them Spaulding For Children, which has an office in Southfield, ALS of Michigan (Lou Gerig's Disease) and the Adoption Budget, Dembs said his hourly fee is between \$50 and \$70, some 30 percent lower than the going rate within the industry.

Last year's revenues amounted to \$45,000, up from 1988 when billings were just \$30,000, Dembs said.

"I never went into this with the idea to make money," he said.

DEMBS ADDED that his company doesn't receive any tax breaks, even with a client base drawing entirely on non-profit organizations.

In the first month of business, Dembs said he advertised through a direct-mail campaign, picking up several clients, while other organizations followed him to his new firm.

"When Gary left and opened his own agency, we wanted to go with him," said Jim Macy, director of the Food Bank of Oakland County. "He's done wonderful, wonderful things for us and I don't know where we would be without him."

In addition to the Springsteen donation, Macy said Dembs was instrumental in setting up the annual "Wheels for Meals" food drive, in which Bob Bauer, a disc jockey with WLLZ-FM in Farmington Hills, camps out in a motor home before Christmas and appeals to listeners to drop off non-perishable food items.

THE FOOD drive supports both the Food Bank of Oakland County and the Gleaners' Food Bank.

In working with non-profit clients, Dembs said the process was not much different than handling traditional businesses. Creating public awareness by landing coverage in newspapers and magazines, and on radio and television, works for both non-profit and for-profit groups equally well, he said.

"In handling almost any organi-

zation, a public relations campaign is basically the same," he said. "Develop a short- and long-term marketing plan, determining an audience, set goals and objectives and put together a budget."

I guess the only difference comes in with fund-raising. You really have to hone in on media relations, membership drives, maybe corporate backing for a special event and there's always a budget to work with."

Marilyn Chastene, development director for Spaulding For Children, a post-adoption and foster care program, said the agency first started working with The Public Image two years ago after responding to a direct-mail brochure.

"ONE OF the first things Gary did for us was arrange a media tour of our various programs and we gained considerable coverage from television and newspapers," she said.

"Gary also arranged for Mike Henneman of the Detroit Tigers to do some promotional spots for us. I think he has a real fine for this kind of work and we're very pleased."

Turning to traditional public relations firms, many assist charitable efforts, often devoting a certain percentage of their accounts to good will efforts.

At D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles in Bloomfield Hills, for instance, the 10-member public relations staff coordinates and runs the Meadow Brook/Charlie Gehringer Golf Classic.

THE ANNUAL event, to be held June 4-5 at the Kathe-Cousins Golf Course in Rochester, raises funds for the preservation of Meadow Brook Hall in Rochester Hills and Oakland University student athletics in Rochester.

"Often we are approached by non-profit organizations and we have a charitable committee take up the cause and decide whether we can offer assistance," said Jo Bourjaily, managing director of BMB&B Public Relations.

"We find that our people enjoy working on non-profit accounts and really get a good feeling about their efforts. It also provides a great outlet for creative ideas."

## Couple dogged by debt

Local financial planning experts reviewed the data of the family profiled here and made general recommendations based on the participant's resources and goals. The information is for educational purposes only. References are not intended as discrimination or endorsements by Observer & Eccentric Newspapers or the advisers.

To receive a free financial planning brochure and/or to obtain a questionnaire to have your finances reviewed in this column, contact the Center for Financial Planning, Dept. 100, 26221 Central Park Blvd., Suite 604, Southfield, MI 48076 or call 948-7900.

The great secret of financial success is to spend what you have left after saving, instead of saving what is left after spending. Bill and Sally Deere are the profiled couple this month and they have learned this lesson the hard way.

Bill and Sally both teach in Wayne County, and they have a combined income of \$84,000. They live comfortably in a \$225,000 residence in Plymouth. This is a major expense in their lives, but they feel it has been worth it. They feel a strong connection to their church, where they tithed. This is another high priority.

They have three children, including a 17-year-old daughter who is entering college in the fall, another daughter who is 14 and a 12-year-old son.

Despite the good income from their teaching jobs, Bill and Sally find themselves significantly in debt. A large portion of their income is used to make the payments on this debt and they are on a month to month merry-go-round without the discretionary cash flow to begin saving for their important long term goals.

### Financial Position

Invested Assets:	
Checking	\$500
IRA's	\$8,400
Tax-Sheltered Annuities	\$4,300
Inheritance	\$50,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$63,200</b>

### Non-Investment Assets:

Residence	\$225,000
Automobiles	\$13,000
Other Possessions	\$13,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$251,000</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$314,200</b>

### Liabilities:

Home Mortgage	\$115,000
Second Mortgage	\$8,700
Bank Loan	\$11,500
Auto Loan	\$12,500
Credit Cards	\$7,000
Student Loan	\$3,000
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$157,700</b>

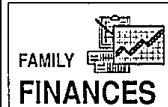
**NET WORTH \$156,500**

### Financial Strengths

- Two wage-earner family
- Good retirement pensions
- Their strong desire to improve their situation
- Recent inheritance
- Good benefits at work

### Financial Weaknesses

- Substantial debts and liabilities
- Cash flow is difficult due to debt service
- Upcoming college costs completely unfunded
- Never developed a budget or spending plan



Bill is 40 years old and Sally is 38. Their combined benefits through work are excellent, with good insurance coverage and a solid pension plan. Both also carry \$250,000 of additional life insurance.

OVER THEIR working lives, they have managed to save a total of \$12,700 in retirement plans while incurring \$42,800 in non-mortgage debt. The bottom line is that over time, they have spent more than their income. This obviously cannot continue indefinitely. A careful review of their priorities is in order.

Fortunately, they have the opportunity to break the cycle. Sally just inherited \$50,000, which will allow them to eliminate a majority of their non-mortgage income. In addition, it will give them a head start in sending their oldest child to college.

Besides their incomes, job-related benefits and the inheritance, Bill and Sally have two other financial strengths. The first is their realiza-

tion that they need to change their habits and the second is their determination to plan ahead.

A major objective they have established is to use this opportunity to begin a savings and investment program for college and retirement.

The inheritance gives them the chance to reduce their debts so that they have the ability to pursue these other financial goals. They believe that they can reduce their monthly outlays by as much as \$1,000 through this debt reduction.

They must realize that there are significant obstacles in their path. Perhaps the most immediate one is the upcoming college costs. During the next 10 years, major outlays will be needed for educational purposes. They expect that each child will attend a state university at a cost to them of approximately \$6,000 per year, adjusted for inflation.

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## Pine seedlings to be distributed

At least two businesses — Ford Motor Co. and Great Scott Supermarkets — are offering free tree seedlings this week in special Earth Day promotions.

Ford Parts and Service Division will offer free emissions tests and air conditioning system checks to the first 300 people who take their cars to the division's general office building, 3000 Schaefer Road, Dearborn.

Ford will offer the tests 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. tomorrow.

The automaker will give a free pine seedling to the drivers of all cars that are tested. People who stop by during those hours to view a vehicle display or talk to representatives about company efforts to work towards a cleaner environment also will receive a free seedling.

Great Scott, which recently

launched a new line of what it bills as earth-friendly and body-friendly products, will give a free Spruce seedling to every customer who purchases two of those President's Choice Green goods.

Great Scott, which operates 34 stores, will continue the giveaway through Sunday or until its supply of 27,000 seedlings are gone. The promotion began Monday.