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Credit Union raises nearly \$42,000 during December PBS pledge drive

Release: Immediate
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DECEMBER 2007 — It started out as the bud of an idea: Try and create a long-term partnership between Education First Credit Union and public television.

But three months later, by late in the night of Dec. 11, the idea had blossomed into nearly \$42,000 worth of pledges and cash for Detroit Public Television.

And for the credit union volunteers who worked the pledge phones that night, it was an evening of fun, laughter and the satisfaction of a job well done.

The project was first proposed in mid-September, following a meeting between Detroit Public Television Executive Producer Dan Dancer and Craig Farrand, the credit union's new director communications and marketing.

"I brought back the concept to our president and CEO, Teri Creighton, and she immediately approved it," Farrand said.

"From there it was a matter of promoting it to our 11,000-plus membership, into our schools and out into the community.

"And based on what we raised last night, everyone responded," he said. "Including our own volunteers.

"We had a great time."

But the volunteers weren't the only ones to enjoy the evening.

"We thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it," said Dina Jones, business campaign assistant for Detroit Public Television.

Jones helped coordinate the evening's activities with Farrand and then acted as greeter, tour guide, hostess and friend for the volunteers who worked the evening.

"I just can't get over the energy level everyone brought with them," she said, while standing behind the cameras as phones rang on stage.

"What I see tonight is an organization committed not only to public television and educational programming," she said, "but also to making the world a better place.

"That what I think public television stands for, and now I know that's what Education First Credit Union stands for.

"This has been a great evening," she said around 9:30 p.m. "And we're not done yet."

The night itself consisted of the 28 credit union volunteers — staff, executives and members of its board of directors — arriving around 6 p.m., having dinner and then moving into the studio for training on how to use the banks of phones and the pledge sheets.

"I didn't know what to expect," said Jennifer Nickens of Southgate, the credit union's in-house staff trainer. "I'd watched other pledge nights on TV, but I never thought it'd be like this."

"Like this" for Nickens meant an evening of interesting phone calls, funny moments and a strong feeling of camaraderie.

"This was an awesome experience," she said. "When they went through the training, I thought there's no way I'd remember everything.

"But when the phones started ringing, the energy levels for everyone increased and I had a great time," she said.

Cindy Morrison-Emmon, a teller at the credit union, told the same kind of story: "I had a lot of fun talking to people.

"I told them I was from Education First Credit Union and one woman from Livonia asked me to wave.

"When I did, she got so excited over the phone — 'I see you!' — that she pledged \$250.

"I hope we do it again next year," she said.

Consider it a wish fulfilled: Teri Creighton already has said she wants her credit union to do the same thing in 2008 — "only better."

"I thought this was a fantastic opportunity for us," Creighton said. "Not only did it allow us to help support excellent educational programming on PBS, but it gave us the kind of exposure that you can't really put a price on.

"That we were able to raise nearly \$32,000 and then match \$10,000 of that is beyond my wildest expectations.

"I can't wait to do this again in 2008," she said.

Both Creighton and board Chairman Lloyd Slinglend were interviewed separately on camera during the night, and took the opportunities to reinforce the credit union's commitment to education.

And both were wearing sunglasses. (More about that in a moment.)

In addition to working the phones pledge night, Education First Credit Union did a tremendous amount of pre-event promotions with its members, its schools and the general public.

This included banners and signs at its main office in Southgate and branch in Brownstown, posters in its nearly three dozen member schools, information on its website and announcements in various publications.

The credit union also created one-of-a-kind promotional t-shirts that were worn by staff members for the month leading up to the Dec. 11 event.

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In fact, the shirt — emblazoned with the two corporate logos and the phrase “two great institutions, one great night” — will soon be used by Detroit Public Television to show other corporate sponsors how to better promote their involvement in other pledge events.

“We’ve never seen this kind of advance promotion by one of our corporate sponsors,” Dina Jones said.

“The shirts, the glasses. It was an extraordinary display of commitment,” she said.

“The glasses” Jones mentioned were yet another of the unique aspects of the credit union’s night on public television: In honor of the Roy Orbison concert that was airing that night, everyone in the studio sported dark, black-rimmed sunglasses.

Later, when the Celtic Woman’s Christmas Concert took to the airwaves, the volunteers switched to green, glitter-covered shamrock-shaped glasses.

(The sunglasses were the brainchild of Craig Farrand; the shamrock glasses: Mike Creighton, the husband of the CEO.)

“When we requested that concert night, the first thing I thought of were having sunglasses for everyone to wear on camera,” Farrand said.

“And then Mike came up with the idea of the shamrock glasses.

“It was great,” Farrand said. “We even had Dave wearing them on camera.”

“Dave” is David Devereaux, vice president of Communications and Brand Management for Channel 56 — and who served as one of the on-air personalities during the pledge night.

“I’m absolutely delighted by the energy and fun everyone’s having,” he said during a break in the evening.

“And I can’t say enough about the commitment the people at this credit union have made.

“Sure, you can write a check,” he said, “but here are 30 volunteers out on a nasty night not only offering to match donations, but work the phones.

“What strikes me most is what a great place this must be to work,” he said.

Devereaux, who’s been with Channel 56 since 1975, starting out as a producer and director, said he was personally “grateful for the donation of time” by the credit union’s employees.

“I think we just created 30 ambassadors for public television.

“And I couldn’t be happier,” he said.

Throughout the night, these new ambassadors took calls from the Detroit area, Michigan and the United States.

In addition, many calls came in from Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and other provinces from our northern neighbor.

“One woman kept trying to tell me her address, but I just couldn’t get through the accent,” said Cindy Morrison-Emmon. “But then I finally figured it out: Newfoundland.”

“And when I waved, she started screaming into the phone — ‘I see you, I see you.’”

The phones rang most during the seven breaks between concert clips, with each break getting longer as the evening wore on.

By 10 p.m., the breaks were 10 minutes long, filled with ringing phones, fast pledges and urgent pitches by Devereaux and his co-host, Kelly Hamilton. At the same time, pledge forms were being whisked away by senior pledge trainers Deborah Sprang and Ken Isherwood and given to studio supervisor Cecilia Bickes.

From there, the forms were scanned and then proofed by a two verifiers just off camera.

It was there that Time Hancock and D’Juana Bryant checked the forms for accuracy, tallied totals, made call backs and confirmed credit card numbers.

The activity in that last hour was at its peak, as everyone sensed a deadline fast approaching. Everything seemed to move even faster as the calls increased and the forms moved from the phone banks to behind the cameras.

Then, at 3 minutes to 11, everything just stopped.

The hot klieg lights dimmed, the phones ceased ringing, the forms stopped moving and everyone simply stood up and started making for their coats.

By 11:15, the last of Education First Credit Union’s volunteers were turning right onto West Grand Boulevard, heading for the Lodge, I-75 — and home.

And Detroit Public Television was adding up its numbers.

The calm before the storm: The Channel 56 studio in Detroit stands empty, waiting for the arrival of Education First Credit Union volunteers.



Before long, the countdown had begun to the first pledge break of the night, with host Dave Devereaux getting his lapel microphone adjusted by floor director Fred Murray.



Once the calls started coming into the studio, Mia Caughy (Brownstown), Jennifer Nickens (Southgate) and Gina Plonka (Southgate) were ready — with camera operator Kathy Dubrish zooming in for a closeup of Nickens on the phone.



As the evening wore on, volunteers Mike Creighton (left), credit union board Treasurer Ed Ronco and board Chairman Lloyd Slinglend all were busy — and sporting “Roy Orbison” sunglasses.



Two of the highlights of the evening for the credit union were the on-air interviews by Dave Devereaux of credit union board Chairman Lloyd Slinglend and President/CEO Teri Creighton.



Later in the evening, Shan Yancy of Southgate (bottom row, left) and her fellow volunteers sported shamrock-shaped glasses during the Celtic Woman concert. Also taking pledges are Beth Dubay (Taylor, top row left), Sandra Mathews (Allen Park), Rebecca Siemen (Lincoln Park), Lisa Hill (South Rockwood, hidden), Sheila Grasso (Trenton) and Rhonda Clark (Taylor).

