

# MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Doyles' Hope for the City leveraged \$300M for charity

By Ellen P. Gabler – Staff Reporter



Friday afternoons you'll find Dennis and Megan Doyle somewhere between stacks of dehydrated milk and crates of carrots. That's when the CEO of Bloomington-based Welsh Cos. steps away from leading one of the Twin Cities' largest property management firms, and instead helps his wife coordinate one of the largest nonprofits in the state.

In 2000, the Doyles founded Hope for the City, an organization dedicated to distributing businesses' surplus goods to the needy. The organization has since ballooned into a charitable powerhouse, responsible for giving more than \$300 million worth of wholesale products to nonprofits helping the poor.

"We made a dent. I couldn't believe it," Dennis Doyle said, grinning.

But don't be fooled. Hope for the City was not just a shot in the dark.

The idea was inspired by the couple's desire to be "strategic" in their giving, Megan

Doyle said.

"We realized we knew who the people helping the poor were, and had relationships with many corporations who had a surplus," she said.

By tapping into Dennis' strong network of business contacts and Welsh Cos.' 23 million square feet of office and warehouse space, the Doyles concocted a lean business plan focused on collaboration.

Instead of creating competition by funding another nonprofit aimed at helping the poor, Dennis said serving as a unique resource for nonprofits seemed like a better fit.

"We want to find the best nonprofits we can and lift up their arms, try to help them as much as we can," he said.

How does it work? Everyone gives a little. Hope for the City spends less than 1 percent of its revenues on overhead. It has five paid staff members; Megan works for free. Donated trucks pick up donated surplus goods from companies across the Twin Cities. Inventory is held for free in a Welsh Cos. warehouse space and a weekly e-mail lets a list of about 80 nonprofit organizations know what Hope for the City has in stock each week. On Fridays, nonprofit representatives come to the warehouse to pick up ground turkey, winter coats or whatever their organization needs. Community organizations pay only \$100 a year to be part of the Hope for the City program. Donated products are also distributed internationally.

Many say it's Dennis Doyle's business prowess and ability to run a tight ship that has helped Hope for the City soar. In its first year, the organization distributed about \$1.8 million in wholesale goods, growing quickly to \$8.5 million the next year, and \$100 million in year three. Last year the count soared to \$111 million.

Diane Thibodeaux relies on Hope for the City every week. Food and milk from the warehouse are staples for her Minneapolis-based organizations Oasis of Love Crisis Intervention Inc. and Agape Child Development Centers.

Thibodeaux said the Doyles' success is due to their leadership and listening.

"They've become a conduit for other folks in the community," she said. "They stepped out, took time that they didn't have, and are helping hundreds of people every week."

Lyn Sahr agrees. Sahr is founder and executive director of Ruby's Pantry in Pine City, a nonprofit founded because of and surviving solely on Hope for the City's donations.

"They listen to people who are successful in business because that's how the world

runs," Sahr said. "And they have a passion for it. Dennis Doyle is a passionate man. He has the resources, plus it makes sense."

Even Nathan, the Doyles' 18-year-old son, is impressed with his parents' innovative philanthropy.

"I think it's cool how they're using the resources they have to their advantage," he said. "If they weren't involved in business, they wouldn't be able to meet some of the needs."

Secret to success

Dennis and Megan say business leaders see Hope for the City as a smart, effective way to give back to the community.

The organization rides on people's tendency to want to do good, Dennis said.

"Given the opportunity ... corporations come forward every time," he said. "People in Minnesota are very, very friendly and willing to help."

Looking ahead, Dennis said, Hope for the City has one mission: "Partner, partner, partner."

So far, the organization has linked up with companies in addition to those donating surplus goods. Car-X, for example, ran a promotion this summer offering customers a free oil change if they donated a bicycle. Hope for the City received 500 bikes that were given to kids in inner-city Minneapolis.

More Hope for the City donations will soon come in the form of new roofs, drainpipes and walls. The Minnesota chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors Inc. has adopted Hope for the City as its charity. Its members will donate services and supplies to nonprofits' facilities. The trade organization comprises more than 23,000 Minnesota contractors, suppliers and professional-service firms.

The group's first project will be to fix up Thibodeaux's 24-hour child-care center. After repairing the roof, painting the building's outside and adding a wheelchair ramp, members will have donated between \$75,000 and \$100,000 worth of their time and materials.

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