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Jay Greene

Health Business Detroit

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Mental health fundraising cruise nets \$38,000 for agency – but raising awareness worth a lot more

It was a beautiful, star-filled Thursday night on Lake Saint Clair when we shoved off on the good ship Ovation with 180 fellow Detroiters.

While most of the guests were there to have a good time, they also were there to chat about how to improve mental health care in Southeast Michigan.

I was invited by Irva Faber-Bermudez, CEO of Detroit Central City Mental Health Inc., which was putting on its annual fundraising event that was designed with a Woodward Dream Cruise auto theme.

Detroit Central City contracted with the Ovation, a 138-foot tri-level yacht owned by Jim Bardy, for the cruise, food, photographer and the variety dance band Persuasion. For more information on the Ovation, visit www.infinityandovation.com

It really was a well-done event. Lots of excellent food and an open bar and unlimited supply of California cabernet wine. ...

"It was the best time, ever," said Faber-Bermudez. "The food was great and the crew was attentive to all of our needs."

While I have been covering mental health issues since the early 1980s, when I did a week-long series on mental health care at the Bradenton Herald, my old newspaper in Florida, I learned a few things at the event last night.

First, Faber-Bermudez said fundraising for mental health services is very difficult.

"Donors seem to respond to calls for homelessness and children's services more readily than for mental health and substance abuse services," she said.

To sell 198 tickets at \$150 each, Faber-Bermudez, her staff and board members made hundreds of phone calls.

"The cold calls to large corporations known for their philanthropy unilaterally failed," she said. "There needs to be a connection with the organization. That is why my board members and I are involved in community groups, other boards and committees."

Detroit Central garnered funding from sponsorships and donations, including corporate sponsors Comerica Bank and PharMor Pharmacy, and supporters Total Health Care, Citizens Bank-Wealth Management and the Leitim Corporation. There were 11 other companies. Visit here for more information. <http://www.dcccmh.org/?p=635>

"We thought it was important to have our consumers attend and meet our supporters," she said. "They had a wonderful experience. Most had never been on a boat before, let alone a yacht."

But Faber-Bermudez said there is a serious message that everyone in the mental health field understands.

The simple fact is this: The mental health care needs of Detroit and Wayne County are increasing while state funding for mental health services is decreasing.

"We have seen 40 percent increase in requests for services just in the last six months," she said.

I reported earlier this year on the effects of four consecutive years of state funding cutbacks to mental health services in Michigan, including another \$8.5 million proposed for fiscal 2012 starting Oct. 1. Click [here](#).

Like most mental health agencies, Detroit Central City has faced its share of cutbacks and is working hard to break even this year. With an \$8.8 million budget, nearly 6 percent comes from grant funding (\$425,000) and fundraising (\$100,000).

Granted, those numbers are abstractions, devoid of human context.

But when you have Wayne County Sheriff Benny Napoleon and Detroit Police Chief Ralph Godbee Jr. saying that mental health funding cutbacks have impacted public safety, law enforcement operations and increased problems with jail overcrowding, you turn those abstractions into real people.

Napoleon said at a meeting I covered in May that it costs Wayne County \$31,000 a year to incarcerate people, but only \$10,000 a year to provide people with outpatient care and proper medications.

"The Wayne County Jail is the largest psychiatric hospital in the state," said Napoleon, noting that as many as 70 percent of people incarcerated in the jail have some form of mental health problems.

Lt. Gov. Brian Calley knows about the problems. I have heard him say he would take this message of the impact of budget cuts back to Lansing.

But state Sen. Coleman Young Jr., who was on the Cruise for a Cause, as it was called, told me that Calley and other Republicans haven't got the complete message.

Young, who also likes to dance under the stars, said Republicans in Lansing are still in budget-cutting mode and still more interested in eliminating tax-breaks for businesses.

Despite any facts and without history on their side, Young said Republicans continue to believe in trickle-down economics.

"Detroit has so many needs – health care, schools, jobs and economic development," said Young, adding that Gov. Rick Snyder has yet to proven he is willing to work on compromise solutions with Democrats.

Too bad because that is the only way I know of to come up with comprehensive solutions to real social problems.

Of course, there always is donating to your favorite cause.

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