



**2010 Dora Maxwell  
Social Responsibility Award Submission**





### **CommStar Credit Union 2009 Community Projects**

- Volunteered public relations efforts for the Children's Developmental Center's Walk and Roll-A-Thon, setting up several radio interviews and event activities.
- Formed a CommStar Credit Union team to walk during the Walk and Roll-A-Thon.
- Sponsored a Wigs for Kid's radio remote and bowl-a-thon to raise money to supply ill and/or recovering children with wigs in Lorain County.
- Formed a CommStar Credit Union team for the bowl-a-thon.
- Held free pictures with Santa Clause open to the public during the Christmas season to alleviate the need to pay for expensive department store pictures for families.
- Held a toy drive in December collecting hundreds of toys that were distributed in surrounding communities.
- Presented 28 seminars at the Community Action Agency and local businesses on financial education, credit maintenance, building your credit, home buying and the credit union difference during 2009.
- Collected/donated over a dozen cases of non-perishable food during November to the local food bank and volunteered 10 hours sorting food.
- Sold candy bars for the Children's Miracle Network.
- Took part in over a dozen community, business and family fairs educating people about the credit union difference.
- Sponsored a Holiday Cheer promotion in support of Harvest for Hunger Food Distribution Center.
- Used our branch grand opening to create awareness and recognition for the Blessing House.
- Volunteered public relations and marketing efforts to the Blessing House for their annual fundraiser, Rock-A-Bye Ball.

## **CommStar Credit Union Supporting the Blessing House**

During the grand opening week of a branch we rebuilt, we wanted to make it about more than just the credit union. It was important to us to use this opportunity of additional ad buys, radio coverage and publicity to educate the community on something bigger. We wanted to show that we truly care about the community and people in it...members and non-members. An organization that stuck out in the community was the Blessing House, a safety net for children of families in crisis. When I say "crisis", that means a broad range of different things. Children stay at the Blessing House because of homelessness, utility shut-off, hospitalization of the parent or caregiver, domestic violence, risk of abuse or neglect, lack of appropriate care/food, legal matters, parenting issues and much more. So many times mom and dad are good parents, but are unemployed and can't afford to pay utility bills or buy groceries. They can turn to the Blessing House as a safe haven for their children while they sort things out.

After discussions with Sister Mary Berigan, the Executive Director of the Blessing House, CommStar confirmed it was an amazing organization to partner with and wanted to help. The goal of the Blessing House was to create awareness of who they are and what they do. They do not have budgets to support public relations, marketing or advertising, therefore are only known by word of mouth. That's when we knew we could help.

Nine radio interviews were scheduled on three different stations that CommStar included a representative of the Blessing House at. During the interviews we promoted the new branch building along with the importance of supporting organizations such as the Blessing House in our communities. As the public started hearing about the Blessing House and some of their stories, phone calls flooded in with support, donations and prayers for the families and children. Radio spots and live mentions by DJs kept the excitement going about the Blessing House and how to help through the week.

We knew the Blessing House was ecstatic with the awareness and buzz that was being created about them, but we wanted to go a step further and make a financial donation as well. We collected dozens of prizes donated by community businesses for the grand opening, including a big-screen television as the grand prize. People were eligible for one entry into the drawing for each \$5.00 donation they made to the Blessing House; everyone was more than willing to donate, especially to win the television!

During the grand opening week, CommStar had flyers and information available for members in our branches and spoke to everyone about the organization as they donated to the Blessing House and entered into the prize drawings. The grand opening was a carnival theme with different events each day centered around families. We had a clown, magician, caricature artist, cotton candy spinner, balloons, cake and more. The highlight of the week came on Friday during our ribbon cutting ceremony. CommStar welcomed community leaders, the mayor, Ohio Credit Union League officials, media representatives and business partners to the ceremony and reception to celebrate not only the new CommStar branch, but the Blessing House. The ribbon cut by CommStar's CEO Ernie Jackson and Mayor Krasienko was not the traditional red or green ribbon, but a ribbon made of money. A \$500 ribbon was cut down the middle and presented to Sister Mary on behalf of the Blessing House from CommStar Credit Union. CommStar also collected an additional \$500 from the prize drawing and member donations.

The week ended on Saturday with a small carnival in our parking lot, lots of cotton candy for all the children currently at Blessing House and a live radio remote that further publicized the Blessing House and their amazing efforts and contributions to the community.

The local newspaper printed a picture and article about the grand opening and the Blessing House.

**1. What were the goals of our project and how did they show social concern for the community? (include measurable goals such as dollars budgeted, number of people impacted, etc.)**

CommStar Credit Union's goal was to inform the community and create awareness about who the Blessing House is and what they do for the community. Our project demonstrated social concern for the community because we used an opportunity to go above what would normally be done for a grand opening that we would have benefited from and geared it toward a selfless organization. We used the opportunity to support media for the Blessing House, a non-profit organization that would not otherwise be able to have radio interviews and be included on radio advertisements. This in-turn, informed the community about services available many may have not known about otherwise.

The Blessing House was impacted as a whole with the awareness that was created and the donations that were made from the public and over \$1,000 from CommStar Credit Union and our members.

**2. How did the project support the needs of the community?**

We all pray that we will never personally need the services the Blessing House provides, but there are so many that do and don't know the help that's available. CommStar Credit Union helped spread the word that there is help for mothers and fathers, grandparents and caregivers that need assistance getting on their feet without going to social services. The Blessing House does not take custody of the children as social services does, so it's truly a safe haven for children and people needed to know that. The community is fortunate to have an organization such as the Blessing House and CommStar Credit Union helped create awareness the organization is available to help.

**3. Define the project's target audience(s), including who was involved and who benefited from the project.**

The target audience was the community as a whole. Two groups benefited from this project for two very different reasons. The Blessing House benefited because they do not have staff to spend time on public relations efforts or budgets to pay for advertising, therefore we did it for them. The Blessing House gained recognition and awareness in the community.

The community benefited for a different reason. They were made aware of the Blessing House and their services and existence. We were able to tell the heart-wrenching stories of children and the successes that came from them. People in the community are now more aware of who the Blessing House is and there is help available.

**4. What strategies were used to reach the project's goal?**

CommStar's strategy was to make a flight schedule of radio ads that included the message that you could donate to the Blessing House and win a big screen television. We booked radio interviews at different day parts (morning drive, afternoon and night drive) to reach as many different audiences as possible. We selected the three most prominent stations in the area and chose them for our advertising. Contacts were utilized at newspapers and community websites to post information notifying people about the grand opening, their chances to win a big screen television and who the Blessing House was (why we were helping them). There was web information about the Blessing House on the CommStar website, Loraincounty.com and the three radio stations' sites. CommStar sent invitations and follow-up emails to newspapers, radio stations and local websites to the grand opening to capture CommStar's ribbon cutting ceremony and the donation to the Blessing House.

**5. How were the project's promotional materials targeted to the intended audiences(s) and how did they communicate the project's goals?**

CommStar made a special radio spot that promoted the television giveaway and how to get entered to win (donate to the Blessing House at our new branch). Newspaper ads used the television giveaway as a visual catch and told how the public could win it. All radio interviews included a representative from the Blessing House that explained who they were and what they did. All promotion for our grand opening celebration included the Blessing House.

**6. How is this project unique? How does it demonstrate the extraordinary effort and devotion of time and organization by the credit union?**

This promotion is unique because:

- A money ribbon was used and donated to the Blessing House. This created a wonderful visual and more interest by local media to publish the story because it was different than a "normal" ribbon cutting ceremony.
- CommStar was able to help an organization that would otherwise not have public relations and marketing. We didn't just donate money, we embraced the needs of our community and promoted the help that is available to everyone.

This project demonstrates the want to help our community by CommStar Credit Union. Extra staff hours were put into marketing, radio interviews and promotions to increase the awareness of the Blessing House. The use of our grand opening to benefit the Blessing House was a perfect fit for both CommStar and the Blessing House. This project was a demonstration of our staff's true dedication as they poured their hearts into the story of the Blessing House and the community it serves. That in turn shows our dedication to the credit union difference.

**7. Please describe the measurable or defined results the project achieved.**

We know we created awareness for the Blessing House as individuals that were not even members of CommStar stopped by our branch to make donations to the Blessing House. As you finish a radio interview and all the phone lines in the radio station are ringing, you know you've done something good. We may not know how many people heard the message, but we do know as people called and stopped by, they told us they didn't know who the Blessing House was before. Some people left with tears in their eyes as they heard the stories of children at the Blessing House. Just reading the stories of the children changed lives. That's success to us.

**8. How does the project demonstrate credit union values of mutual self-help, cooperation, economic empowerment and volunteerism?**

This is what being part of a credit union is about. Helping an organization that does so much and having employees that dedicate their life to helping others in our community. CommStar being able to help them in the areas they are lacking (public relations and media dollars), as they help others in the community. It can be looked at as passing it down. We helped the Blessing House, they help families and hopefully those families will go on to do something good for someone else. The Blessing House not only takes in the children, but loves them and cares for them as their own.

CommStar prides ourselves on helping the community whether it's education, volunteering, seminars and so on...but being a part of an organization such as the Blessing House and volunteering our time and efforts is where the heartfelt rewards are and this project will be with us forever.

# CommStar Credit Union's Health Associates Grand Opening celebration to benefit the Blessing House



\$500 ceremonial money ribbon for the Blessing House

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# CommStar Credit Union's Grand Opening celebration to benefit the Blessing House

Sister Mary Berigan, Executive Director of the Blessing House speaks about her gratitude for CommStar Credit Union and the efforts put forth to improve community awareness by the event.



CommStar Credit Union's President and CEO, Ernie Jackson addresses the importance of serving our community during the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Mayor Tony Krasienko expresses his delight with CommStar Credit Union and praises the Blessing House for the great work they do.



# CommStar Credit Union's Grand Opening celebration to benefit the Blessing House



Ceremonial ribbon is donated to Sister Mary Berigan on behalf of the Blessing House.

## CommStar Credit Union's Grand Opening celebration to benefit the Blessing House



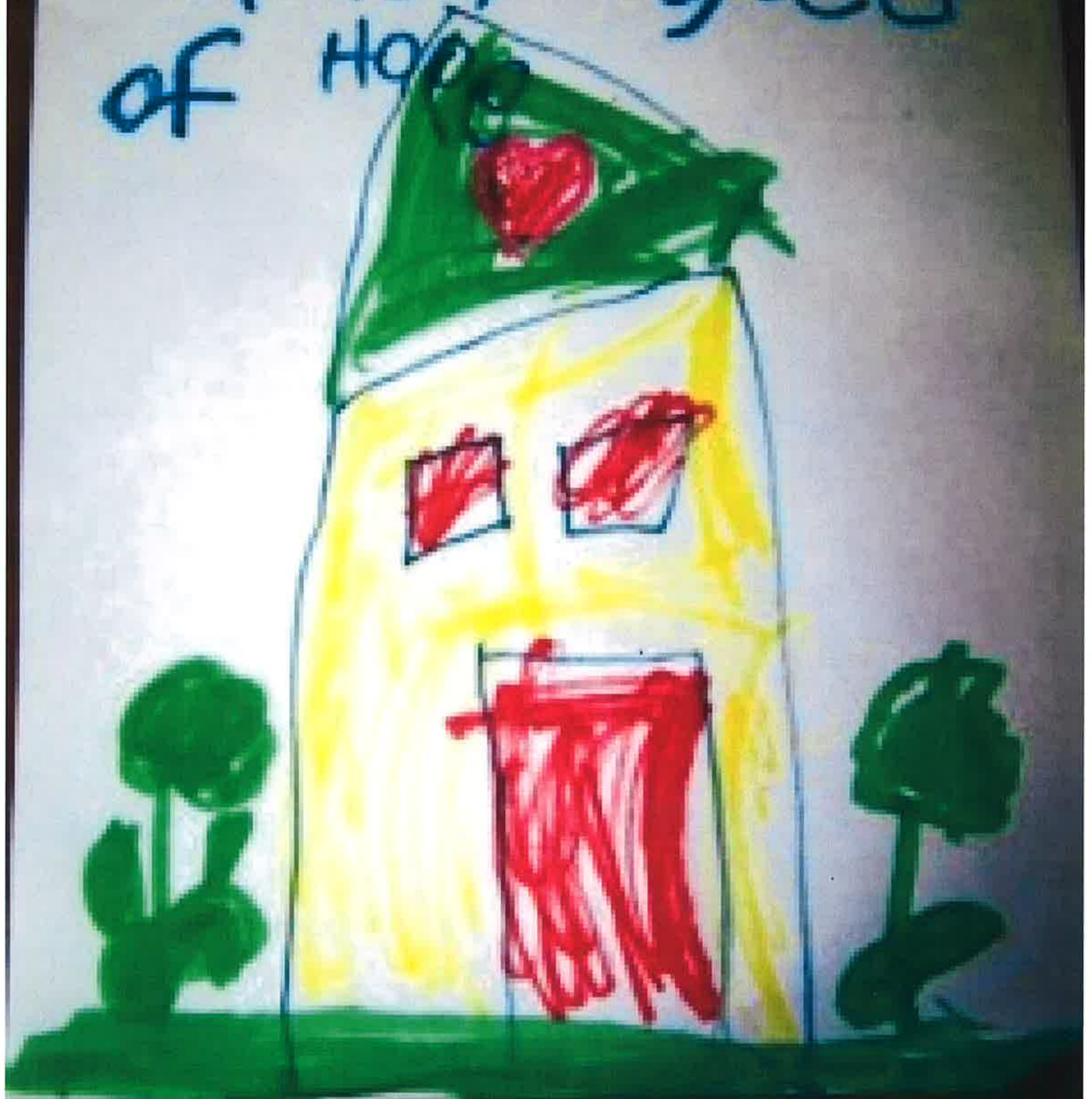
Sister Mary Berigan of the Blessing House and Courtney Fisk of CommStar together for radio interviews during the live remote at the grand opening.

# CommStar Credit Union's Grand Opening celebration to benefit the Blessing House



Top left: Mayor Krasienko having his caricature drawn. Top right: caricatures outside for the public. Bottom left: grand opening banner inside branch. Bottom right: cake and cotton candy for Blessing House children.

Diezzing Hope  
God's project  
of Hope





# Blessing House

God's Project of Hope

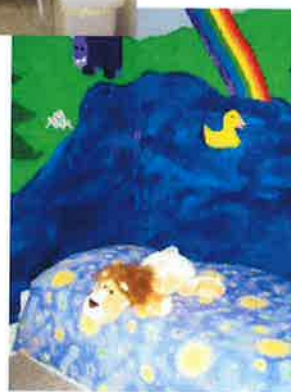
Safe House  
Safe Child



Each child that passes through the Blessing House leaves a piece of them as a remembrance to all that have been helped and loved at the Blessing House.



In April, 2007, after working as part of a group for two years to pass legislation and develop new licensing rules specifically for these types of facilities, Blessing House was the first center to be licensed in the State of Ohio as a Children's Crisis Care Facility.



Blessing House serves as a safety net for children of families in crisis by providing a temporary safe home for children and support for their families.





## **500 Children – A Blessing House Story**

He was 5, with dark brown curly hair and he loved to talk. His brother was 4, and the shirt he was wearing was inside out, but he didn't seem to mind. His sister was 5 months old and her smile matched her disposition.

They were like so many of the children who had come before them. But there was something special to us about this group.

V., R. and Y. were the 499<sup>th</sup>, 500<sup>th</sup>, and 501<sup>st</sup> children to come and stay at Blessing House since we opened. This is quite a milestone for us and gives us cause for reflection as we celebrate the birth of another child a long time ago who came and changed the world.

Each time we walk through our playroom, we see and we are surrounded by the footprints and handprints of the children who have stayed at Blessing House. Each child has left a part of him or herself, not only on our wall but in our hearts as well. We see a name and think about a child who came to us hungry, but learned to trust that there would be enough to eat while he stayed with us. We think about a child who came often because her mom was sick and told us she was coming "home" whenever she walked in the door.

We think about the first child who stayed with us, and the email we just received from his mom, giving us an update about how well he is doing now. We think about the family whose 3 girls rush up to us whenever they see us at their school, wondering when they can come back to Blessing House for a visit.

We think about the 2 girls who left with their mom when she got a place to live, and wonder if they are still there. We think about the family of 4 whose gas was turned off and wonder if they are staying warm.

We think about the great grandmother who is raising her 2 great grandchildren and wonder if she is doing OK. We think about the 2 children whose Mom is in a daily struggle with substance abuse and hope that she is still sober.

We think about all of the families and children we have helped this Christmas season. We cherish the memories of the looks on their faces, their hugs and their tears of joy as they tell us how thankful they are for everything we do for them.

500 children have come to stay at Blessing House.  
On the average, a new child comes to our door every 3 days.

A child who needs a safe place to stay.  
A child who needs someone to love them and to protect them.  
A mom, dad, grandma or grandpa who needs help.

Over 2000 years ago, a family on a journey needed help, and they, too, needed a safe place to stay. Then a stranger offered them a place of comfort and protection. The baby born on this night, in the stable where he lay, left his handprint behind, too. And his print, the star that announced his birth to the world, reminds us of God's promise to all who believe.

That star continues to shine in the face of each child who comes through our door. The child who squeals with joy as she swings higher and higher. The child who snores softly as he cuddles with his teddy bear under the covers. The child who wants a high five because he has just won a game of Monopoly. The child who walks out our door, asking when she can come back again.

We have seen this star 500 times now and we know that each child who comes to us is a gift whose presence will also change the world in some way. We have been blessed to be a part of their journey.