

PHILANTHROPY MATTERS

The Neighborly Thing to Do



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With Ocean Reef situated between Homestead and Key Largo and our Foundation serving the two very different counties where its employees live, we often find our Community Grants program uniquely positioned to bridge the two communities. Because Homestead and Florida City are at the southernmost edge of Miami-Dade County and meet Key Largo at the northernmost reach of Monroe County



Kids participating in the Ocean Reef-funded KLS Summer Recreation program making Father's Day cards during Arts & Crafts.

(almost 100 miles from the county seat), the services in the neighboring county are often more accessibly located. Our Community Grants program makes a concerted effort to connect programs in both areas to blur the manmade county lines that can serve to artificially separate residents from nearby services.

I was reminded of this last

week when I opened a fat manila envelope of colorful handmade cards and carefully printed thank you notes on ruled school paper from the 5th grade class at Key Largo School. The kids were fresh from the excitement of experiencing, what for many was their first live theatrical performance, "Rock Odyssey" at the Adrienne Arsht Center in Miami. The trip

for a professional production in a big city theater is part of the Learning Through the Arts program that enables Miami-Dade County teachers to use the dramatic arts as a teaching tool in the classroom.

When we received the application for Learning Through the Arts for kids in Homestead and Florida City years ago, we asked if they would consider extending the opportunity to Key Largo School and found they were pleased to oblige. One question and bus transportation were all it took to open up the magical world of theater to nearly 100 kids, and virtually every 10 year old in Key Largo since. It was an "ah-ha" moment.

We now get a similar package from KLS after South Florida Science Center brings their Science Passport program of



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exciting hands-on science experiments, which normally only extends to Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade. After kids had an opportunity to dissect squid and frogs recently, I got one of my all-time favorite notes: "Thank you for buying the dead frogs for KLS. I know it cost a lot but it was worth it because it was very fun and I and all the kids learned so much. Did you know frogs have a membrane covering their eyes like goggles so they can see under water!?!"

As many more organizations serve Miami-Dade County, we're most often able to extend new programs into underserved Monroe, but the road goes both ways. Another successful cross-county collaboration is

with the Domestic Abuse Shelter, which offers the invitation to participate in the prevention programs we fund for the relatively small number of Key Largo teens to the receptive variety of teen programs we work with in Homestead and Florida City.

Interestingly, we find most of our applicants are very agreeable to extending services across our interest areas but have simply never had a reason to cross the county line. Our grants program has embraced the prospect. The condition that any funded services should be available to residents of both areas whenever possible is an increasingly routine addition to our grant agreements. We continue to look for opportunities to connect our neighbors and extend services in common sense ways.