

Do you live here, give here?

Campaign seeks to boost local philanthropy

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One of the best big cities, places to live in America. One of the greenest and fittest. One of the best cities for singles. One of the best places to do business, for jobs, for entrepreneurs. The best city for Hispanics. Third in volunteerism.

When it comes to rankings, Austin often is found toward the top.

But when it came to giving, Austin ranked No. 48 out of the 50 largest U.S. cities.

Austin's low grade was the genesis of a campaign — "I Live Here, I Give Here" — to boost the city's philanthropy. The effort kicked off on Tuesday during a lunchtime event in the atrium of Austin City Hall that was attended by more than 200, including members of the City Council and the local business, religious and nonprofit communities.

"The statistic we're seeing here, we're not used to. Usually, I'm a little perturbed when we're No. 2," Mayor Will Wynn remarked to laughter.

"So we're 48," he said. "The truth hurts."

Among those surveyed in Austin, the average discretionary income — income after basic living expenses — was \$67,879 while the average charitable donation was \$3,913, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy, which produced the ranking.

The study was based on Internal Revenue Service information on 1997 tax returns of people who itemize their deductions, as well as U.S. Census Bureau data and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics interviews conducted quarterly with about 7,500 Americans.

By comparison, in the No. 1-ranked city, Detroit, the average discretionary income was \$26,827, while the average charitable donation was \$3,239.

"But we're a caring community. How can this be?" said campaign director Patsy Woods Martin, recalling eaction to Austin's ranking.

A group of organizations — the Association of Fundraising Professionals Greater Austin Chapter;

Austin Community Foundation; Junior League of Austin; Public Strategies, Inc., the campaign strategist that has worked pro bono on the effort; and United Way Capital Area — joined a few years ago and funded research conducted last year that addressed what Central Texans thought about local needs and giving.

They found that one in three said they didn't know enough about the needs in Central Texas and 82 percent said that they would give more if they better understood the needs.

There is "a gap between our values and our action," Woods Martin said. The message, she said: "Find your passion and give."

"We need to up the ante," the Rev. Jennifer Rousseau Cumberbatch of Agape Christian Ministries said at the event. "We got next."

The campaign seeks to educate Central Texans about the local needs, said Evvie Nazro, of Public Strategies, and a spokeswoman for the campaign. "The research gave us our strategy."

Allison Knaupe, of Public Strategies, urged attendees to spread the campaign's message, visit ILiveHereIGiveHere.org, and give at least 3 percent, but work toward 5 percent, of their annual income.

The proposed budget for the two-to-three-year campaign is about \$2 million. Less than half of the budget will come from cash donations, while in-kind contributions, such as advertising and pro-bono labor, accounts for the remainder.

The Austin American-Statesman, which provided free advertising space for the effort, is one of 10 members of the campaign's corporate council.

David Balch, president and chief professional officer of United Way Capital Area, said recent transplants to Austin might not be giving because they are not rooted in the community. In addition, he said people generally begin to think philanthropically in their early 30s, while the average age in Austin is 28.5.

The campaign effort is bigger than any one organization or individual, Balch said. "People will not be connected unless everyone comes together on this."

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