

## Helping nonprofits navigate the art of giving

By LYNNETTE HINTZE/Daily Inter Lake | Posted: Monday, November 21, 2016 6:00 am

One of the most important tenets Chany Reon Ockert strives to convey to the nonprofit organizations she helps is that fundraising is not begging for money.

“It’s giving an opportunity for someone to fulfill their passion,” she points out.

As a certified fundraising executive, Ockert’s livelihood revolves around working with nonprofits to create a culture of philanthropy. She owns her own consulting business built on many years of working in the nonprofit arena.

Ockert, of Bigfork, is one of only 20 certified fundraising executives in Montana, and one of only four certified fundraising consultants in the state.

“It takes years of experience in fund development” to master the four-hour examination it takes to achieve the certification through CFRE International, an independent organization dedicated to setting standards for fundraising executives.

“There is a great deal of fear around asking for money,” she said, “yet Americans are some of the most generous people. In fund development there’s so much more” than simply asking people to donate money to a nonprofit.

Ockert works with nonprofit boards of directors to help them connect with their own generosity.

“I do a lot of coaching behind the scenes, a lot of role-playing,” she said.

There’s a good deal of strategy that goes into fundraising. Ockert helps organizations determine the best way to ask for donations. Some people love to go to events; most don’t, she noted. One nonprofit, for example, conducted a “budget auction” that explained in detail how the money was used. That created more committed donors, she noted.

“Nonprofits also need to make sure there’s a match, a natural fit for the donor,” Ockert advised. Grocery stores, for instance, are ideal giving partners for food banks.

Many Main Street businesses get hit up for donations time and time again, so it’s important for



### Monday Profile: Chany Ockert

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merchants to think about how they're investing their philanthropic donations. It helps to create solid guidelines and stick to them, she advised.

Ockert has operated her consulting business in the Flathead Valley for 10 years, and was the coordinator for one of her clients, the Nonprofit Development Partnership for eight and a half years. She recently separated from that organization.

During her time with the Nonprofit Development Partnership she completed a study — funded with a \$15,000 grant from the Applied Materials Foundation — to conduct a needs assessment that looked at the capacity needs of Flathead County nonprofits. She found that of the organizations that got training through the partnership, 96 percent were able to identify their management and administrative needs. Of the nonprofits without training, only 36 percent were able to identify similar needs.

There are 408 nonprofits headquartered in Flathead County, not counting churches.

Flathead County residents give at a rate of 3.5 percent of their income, more generous than much of the nation, which is about 2 percent, 2012 philanthropic study noted.

“We can definitely be proud of our generosity here in the Flathead,” Ockert said.

Ockert dipped her toes into the fundraising pool not long after completing her degree in political science and international relations, with a minor in history, from Carroll College in Helena. She initially contemplated becoming a lobbyist, but after working for a lobbyist firm briefly, she quickly surmised: “It’s not for me.”

Ockert instead headed to Maine, where she started as a temporary employee for a nonprofit, A Family For Me, that became a permanent job.

“I stayed in Maine and New Hampshire for six years and got an introduction to the nonprofit world,” she said.

Ockert helped recruit foster and adoptive homes for children in foster care, during which time she and a colleague, along with the nonprofit received an Excellence in Adoption award in 2003 for developing innovative methods of recruiting foster and adoptive families from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“We did outreach that was open and honest,” she said. “We asked [potential foster parents], are you up to the challenge?”

Ockert learned early on that nonprofits could be identified in two tiers: those that had support through training and those who couldn't afford training in fundraising. Not surprising, those without training couldn't fulfill their mission as well.

Striving to learn all she can about fundraising and then sharing with others about the process seems

to come naturally to Ockert, but truth be told she's always been motivated to succeed, and just might be a bit of an over-achiever. It started at Frenchtown High School in the 1990s.

"There were 69 of us in our class, and 68 went on to college," she said about the Frenchtown Class of 1996. "We pushed each other so hard. We all felt like it was the next stage of life that mattered.

"There were a lot of first-borns in our class," she added with a laugh.

During her junior year she studied overseas in what was East Germany before the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. In fact, she was the first American to visit and stay in that community after the veil of Communism was lifted.

Ockert has tenacity in her family tree, too. She's the fourth generation of a Montana family that built much of the town of Lincoln.

Five years ago she underwent treatment for Hodgkin's lymphoma and slowly worked her way back. She's now cured of the rare cancer.

Outside of her professional life, Ockert loves jazz and the outdoors. She served on the board of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation from 2006 to 2010, and also worked for the U.S. Forest Service at Schafer Meadows, first as a volunteer and then for two years as a seasonal employee.

Pausing to describe her persona, she offered, "I'm a typical eclectic Montana woman."

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