

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

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New platform to connect nonprofits to donors, volunteers launches in Detroit

SHERRI WELCH



- ⇒ Free Share Detroit platform modeled after sites used in four other cities
- ⇒ Local businessmen led efforts to bring site to Detroit, providing operating support
- ⇒ Looking to sustain site operation through philanthropy, sponsorships

A free, web-based platform that links Detroit nonprofits with volunteers and donors has launched.

Nonprofit [Share Detroit](#) was founded by co-chairs Paul Vlasic, founder, RSVP Ventures & Capital, the Vlasic Group and the Vlasic Family Foundation, and founder and chairman of Amplifinity; and Sam Rozenberg, founder and CEO, Keeping IT Strategic. The two have provided a combined \$500,000 for initial development of the platform, its Detroit launch and two years of operating costs.

The free platform enables nonprofits of all sizes to set up a page on the site to attract donations and volunteers, publicize their events and post wish lists of items needed that supporters can shop for on Amazon. It is modeled after other Share sites developed by Share Good in Charlotte, N.C., and Omaha, Neb. Detroit is the fifth market in the country to launch the platform.

There are other sites that offer similar services to nonprofits, like Volunteer Match and crowdfunding sites that cover their costs from transactional fees, said Rozenberg, chairman emeritus of the Yad Ezra Kosher Food Pantry in Berkley. There's nothing wrong with businesses making a profit, but those fees are present a barrier for small nonprofits to access such sites.

Share Detroit is the first to connect nonprofits with supporters for donations, needed items, volunteers and events promotion on one platform with no cost for those services, he said.

Following early outreach from Share Detroit, about 116 nonprofits of all sizes have created free pages on the site over the past month or so, from Brilliant Detroit, Say Detroit and Oak Park-based Forgotten Harvest to Fleece & Thank You in Farmington Hills and I Heart Dogs in Warren and more. The nonprofits are divided into categories like "children," "veterans," "education" and "animals."

Share Detroit hopes to host more than 250 nonprofits on the site by summer.



Share Detroit

Janette Phillips

It recently named Janette Phillips, the former interim executive director and director of development for Mercy Education Project in Detroit, as its first executive director, to work with two other part-time employees to attract both nonprofits and grants and gifts to support the site's operation longterm.

Vlasic made a \$250,000 investment in Share Good LLC, the Omaha-based company that developed the platform a few years ago, Rozenberg said. After the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation acquired the platform last year and converted it to nonprofit status, that investment converted to a donation.

The two local businessmen have donated another \$250,000 to fund startup costs and two years' of operations for Share Detroit, a platform serving nonprofits in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. And they plan to continue funding the site until sustainable funding is in place.

"Paul (Vlasic) was involved with the Share Good platform development prior to me coming on the scene," said Rozenberg who joined the effort about a year and a half ago when invited by Vlasic.

"One of the impetus for him to get involved was he wanted to bring something back home to Detroit."

Bringing to life a resource that can have such an impact for nonprofits in the region is truly rewarding, Vlasic said in a release.

It's a labor of love that I see working around the clock to help charitable groups attract the volunteers and funds they so need."

"Community service and philanthropy have always been an important part of life, and my family and I appreciate the opportunity to help nonprofits in metro Detroit fulfill their missions—quicker and easier—while helping volunteers and donors discover greater

meaning and connection in their contributions," he said.

Rozenberg said he appreciates larger nonprofits but "usually, they are bloated with bureaucracy."

"The smaller nonprofits are truly the ones that make a difference," he said

"I wanted to provide an ecosystem which helps them mature, to access community members who want to do something good," he said.

For those who want to "do good," the platform offers a single stop for nonprofits seeking support and volunteers, Rozenberg said, and opportunities to maximize the value of their time by matching their skills to volunteer needs and opportunities, he said.

"Paul and I are committed to continue (donating) until we replace it with a more sustainable and permanent funding source."

Phillips said she and Share Detroit's team are working to engage corporate sponsors. "That's a key part of the funding going forward ... by definition, they'd be supporting all the nonprofits in Detroit, not just one or two."

"We want to prove our success and the availability of (the platform). Then I'll be making the larger requests to larger foundations and family foundations, as well, she said.

Share Detroit is operating on a \$150,000 annual budget. It's set a goal to help nonprofits raise at least \$1 million the first year through the platform, Phillips said, which can accommodate PayPal donations and direct transfer payments. Though nonprofits may incur fees associated with third-party payment providers, Share Detroit's services will be free.

Inline Play

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