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TV's The Apprentice Inspires Twin Cities United Way

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Dr. Randall Pinkett judges corporate volunteer competition

The Greater Twin Cities United Way spiced up the enthusiasm for its annual campaign drive with a volunteer 'Apprentus' competition modeled after entrepreneur-millionaire-extraordinaire Donald Trump's critically acclaimed NBC television reality series, The Apprentice.

The event was created by United Way's Emerging Leaders Program, which encourages the next generation of leaders to become involved in their community by exposure to real, firsthand depictions of various aspects of philanthropy. "United Way's Apprentus competition is an opportunity for leading Twin Cities corporations to put their volunteer skills to use and to provide examples of how to help those in need right in our own community," says Jacinda Adams, senior market segment manager and Workforce United Way Emerging Leaders Program manager.

Adams, who was the creative mind behind the 'Apprentus' competition is a self-proclaimed Apprentice junkie. She admits that this was "a venture with no template, just pioneers leading the way for other volunteers. The original idea was an essay contest for children, then the idea transformed into United Way's version of the high-rated television show. "This was perfect because its ideals were in line with Emerging Leaders," said Adams.

United Way went agency shopping among its community partners to match the companies selected to participate. Adams encouraged directors of the agencies to dream as big as they possibly could in communicating their needs. Louis King, CEO of Summit Academy O.I.C. responded, "Well, I've got two butt-ugly rooms."

Four of the Twin-Cities premiere corporations, who are longtime contributors to the United Way campaign, participated in the competition. They were challenged to transform chosen spaces of four Twin-Cities agencies, including Summit Academy O.I.C. within a one-month time period, beginning on September 11 and ending October 6. The teams went to work with only a \$2,200 budget.

"Apprentice" Dr. Randall Pinkett, winner of the 2005 competition, visited the Twin Cities to participate in the final stages of the competition, including judging and conducting the boardroom, as well as delivering a keynote address and announcing the winners.

General Mills remodeled the kitchen of the Oak Park Neighborhood Center. This team was recognized for having the best hands-on experience. The challenge of this project afforded the know-how of experts. From painting to polishing chrome, laying tile and sanding down wood surfaces, the General Mills' team used their resilience and determination to grant Oak Park a beautiful, functional kitchen.

Target Corporation tackled the lobby and lounge space at Catholic Charities' Exodus Residence. Target's team did the best job at exceeding expectations. They leveraged their resources, business clients and hidden talent to create a haven that says "Welcome" without the Exodus staff ever saying a word.

Cargill had the greatest challenge, transforming the children's activity space of Horizons Youth Program at Sabathani Community Center in a matter of only two weeks. Their diligence afforded them the winner for best mobilization of resources. Team members recruited their families as well as familiar faces around Sabathani willing to give a helping hand, purging their talents and imaginations to turn a rugged old space into a child's paradise for the inner city youth that participate in this program.

Best Buy renovated Summit Academy O.I.C.'s community classroom. This team earned the award for best long-term value to the agency as well as the grand prize. Team Best Buy installed electronic products from several of its vendors and replaced carpet and seating among many other things. Best of all, they designed a tribute wall in honor of the late Harry Davis, filled with photos donated from Davis' family. The spirit of the

**project was captured in a quote by Summit Academy O.I.C. CEO Louis King, which was painted on the wall:
“The best social service program is a job.”**

Dr. Pinkett’s address entitled, “Balancing the Double Bottom Line: A Call to Action for Emerging Leaders in the 21st Century,” focused on balancing corporate success and community viability, which epitomizes his professional goals. “Throughout life, I’ve sought to pursue the life of an entrepreneur and some measure of social responsibility,” said Pinkett in his keynote address at the International Market Square.

Dr. Pinkett is the founder, president and chief executive officer of BCT Partners, a multimillion-dollar management, technology and policy consulting services firm based in Newark, New Jersey, that works with corporations, government agencies and nonprofit organizations. He is currently overseeing both renovation and information technology projects for Trump Entertainment Resorts in Atlantic City, NJ. He is also completing two books, *Campus CEO: How to Start and Grow a Million-Dollar Business on Any College Campus* and *Black Faces in White Places*.

In praise for United Way’s ‘Apprentus’ concept, Dr. Pinkett said, “it captures the spirit of the show...having to get something done under duress, under tight time constraints...but what I really love about it is that it’s making a difference in people’s lives. Oftentimes people say, well [you’re] a businessman, but I also have concerns that we are creative and entrepreneurial in our approach to give back,” he said.

Dr. Pinkett brought his community-building agenda to light as a Ph.D. candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His thesis on creating community connections explained how technology can help strengthen community organizations. “This [led] to what we do at BCT; we offer a variety of services that help them [foundations, non-profit agencies, corporations] do what they do better...our tagline is, “Your partner in solutions that matter.”

In his speech, Dr. Pinkett outlined trends that have emerged in response to a failure to “balance what we do professionally and what we do civically,” such as: mergers, economic downturns with ‘dot com,’ and an increased gap between the haves and the have-nots. “These trends set the stage for a newly needed way of thinking for approaching charity and giving back to the community,” said Dr. Pinkett. This new thinking, which he called the mindset of the social entrepreneur, has a three-pronged approach:

- A corporation must value social practices as much or if not more than the brand.
- A charitable organization must be able to be more entrepreneurial and not afraid to take risks.
- Community volunteers and residents must embody social entrepreneurship have a mindset about being resourceful.

“We all need to think outside of the box and think about seizing, seeking and seeing opportunity. This means using everything at your disposal is our responsibility as emerging leaders,” said Dr. Pinkett. When asked what every person should keep in mind when it comes to giving back, he said, “...Somebody did something for them to give them the opportunities that they have, and they should see it as a responsibility to someone else; there is little in life that happens individually.”

This is not the ordinary model of volunteerism. In this case, everybody is impacted, including the companies, United Way and its partner agencies, and most importantly, the people served by those agencies. “It’s a multi-faceted form of gratification for all entities involved,” said Adams.

“Now I understand,” said Tolá Oyewole, senior community relations specialist for Best Buy and project manager for the Best Buy Apprentus team. “Before I didn’t paint, roll carpet or anything. I did break some nails. It was like a second job.

“It means something more when we’re in the community. Also, the formation of new relationships and friendships — that makes it real,” said Oyewole.

“The Twin Cities has positioned itself as a hotbed of innovation. This is the poster child or example to set with corporations and let it spread throughout the country like an earthquake, a seismic wave, a new way of thinking,” said Marsha Pitt-Phillips, public relations manager for United Way.

“Getting involved, the networking opportunities, giving tools to a sound philosophical person...I really didn’t understand the value of relationships. It’s powerful the way companies think...not just a name, said Tomme Beevas,

Director of community involvement & public affairs at Cargill and project manager for the Cargill Apprentus team. “It’s a spin on the greater cause. Before, I didn’t see United Way as a volunteer organization.”

“This concept defines a new corporate philosophy. Your name is out there while you’re improving the community and demonstrating and developing leadership skills,” said Todd Jasin, marketing segment manager at United Way.

It was estimated that the volunteer time, work day, salaries, and products given towards these projects was possibly \$250,000- \$300,000 worth of time and resources. In Dr. Pinkett’s view, “Volunteers are not paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.”