



<http://www.virginiabusiness.com/index.php/news/article/doing-good-nonstop>

Stafford continues charitable work well after “People’s Inaugural”

June 6, 2010

Earl W. Stafford was a “PK”— a preacher’s kid — and once a PK, always a PK.

The longtime Northern Virginia businessman and philanthropist grew up in New Jersey as one of 12 children of a Baptist minister. His father, Robert, did manual labor to support his large family. His mother, Mabel, worked as a domestic. But Stafford never felt poor.

“We didn’t have much,” he admits, “but my mother was always sending a pot of something down the street to someone who had even less. I was immersed in a value system of giving sacrifice. Specifically and unconditionally, I didn’t have a choice in who I became.”

Before he became a philanthropist, he was a successful businessman. In 1988, after a successful Air Force career, Stafford started Centreville-based Universal Systems & Technology Inc. (UNITECH) to provide interactive training and simulation tools to the military. UNITECH had more than 400 employees in early 2009 when he sold the company to Lockheed Martin for an undisclosed amount. Stafford, 62, now heads the Wentworth Group LLC, a Reston-based holding company that provides counseling, business and financial support to small companies that cater to the federal market.

But even while pursuing two careers (and earning a college degree and an MBA in his “spare” time), Stafford never forgot his PK roots. In 2002, he founded the Stafford Foundation to partner with other nonprofits in providing health care, education and training to the poor and disadvantaged with the goal of teaching people to help themselves. “The only thing we want to dish out is opportunities,” Stafford says. The foundation also focuses on faith-based charitable efforts.

For six years, the foundation quietly went about its mission. Then, Stafford came up with the idea for the People’s Inaugural Ball. He envisioned bringing marginalized people from all across the country to Washington, D.C., to celebrate the swearing-in of the nation’s first African-American president, Barack Obama. Suddenly, Stafford and his foundation became front-page news.

With the help of about 40 other nonprofits, Stafford invited more than 300 people to the capital. He provided his guests — homeless people, battered women, recovering addicts, wounded veterans, the mentally and physically disabled, hurricane survivors — with everything from luxury accommodations at the JW Marriott Hotel to tuxedos and ball gowns. The tab for the three-day event was reported to be more than \$2 million.

Marlon Ray, who mentors teenage boys through a tiny Fredericksburg nonprofit called 11408 (the date of Obama’s election, Nov. 4, 2008), was one of those who attended the People’s Inaugural. He had heard about the event through the media and e-mailed Stafford about his “one-man show.” Ray and two of his young charges received invitations. Stafford “really poured out from

his heart to give to these people,” Ray says. “In a me-myself-and-I society, I give him the utmost praise.”

But the inaugural was 18 months ago, and Stafford has moved on. “Anyone can throw a party, but our commitment is tested when the cameras go off,” he says.

That commitment is manifested in the foundation’s relationship with more than 25 nonprofits. They include N Street Village in Washington, which helps homeless women, and Children’s Hospital in Charleston, S.C. The ball also led to new relationships, such as with Ray’s 11408 program, which recently received a foundation grant for five \$1,000 scholarships, and with the District’s chapter of the College Board’s Upward Bound program. Like Ray, Marlene A. Guy, Upward Bound’s program director, met Stafford at the People’s Inaugural and since has been granted four \$1,250 scholarships for her low-income high school students. “I can’t say enough about his warm heart,” she says.

Stafford’s generosity has been recognized by the Salvation Army of Greater New York, the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, which gave him its 2010 Horatio Alger Award “in recognition of his personal and professional success despite humble and challenging beginnings.”

Yet Stafford continues to look for ways to do more. In January, he launched an innovative online charitable campaign called Doing Good. “We want to be a connection,” he says. Although the foundation still is working out the kinks, its website eventually will function as a clearinghouse, where donors and volunteers can locate organizations that most suit their areas of concern, even if they have as little as an hour or a dollar to give.

Doing Good got a big boost when comedian Bill Cosby filmed a public service announcement for the campaign. “When I read about the Stafford Foundation and Mr. Stafford’s unbelievable work, I felt I had to call and offer the talents of Bill Cosby for free,” the comedian says. Stafford returns the compliment. “Bill Cosby is one of my heroes,” he says. “He’s a great humanitarian.”

In addition to Doing Good, Stafford is involved in a project particularly close to his heart: The Rev. Robert W. and Mabel E. Stafford Center, which is under construction in the West African nation of Burkina Faso. The 10-acre compound outside the capital, Ouagadougou, will include a church, two orphanages, a primary school and an adult training center. Ministers from more than a dozen surrounding countries will be able to train there.

Stafford’s partner in the project is Hampton-based International Cooperating Ministries (ICM), which has built more than 3,400 churches in 51 countries. Stafford had partnered with the ICM on several other church-building projects in Africa before he had the idea for the Burkina Faso complex, which will honor his parents.

“Our model is bare bones,” says Janice Allen, the ICM’s executive director. “It is all about leveraging and multiplication. That appeals to businesspeople like Mr. Stafford who like to get the biggest bang for their buck.”

The ICM, for example, has no paid overseas staff, and that economical approach dovetails with Stafford’s commitment to an expense ratio of less than 10 percent of donations. Allen has nothing but praise for the philanthropist’s leadership, experience and attitude of respect. “We look at Mr. Stafford as a divine appointment,” she says.

But, Stafford, the PK, is considerably more modest. “As a Christian,” he says simply, “the principles of Jesus Christ are the basis of leading my life.”