

# Good Thinking

DNA Creative Communications cracks the code

# TOWN



## DNA Creative Communications cracks the code

In the current climate, it's easy for businesses to be focused on making profit. But for Debbie Nelson, the foundation of her company is to support the community that has helped her business to thrive. The Center for Development Services, the American Heart Association—Upstate, SC, and the International Ballet Academy all are organizations that have received invaluable pro bono assistance from her company, DNA Creative Communications. In business, it's called servant leadership—serving yourself by first serving others. And it's at the core of Nelson's company.

Nelson launched her firm fourteen years ago after raising children and volunteering extensively. "My experiences allowed me to see the many needs in our community," she explains of her decision to start a business. "Through business, I can bring more resources to [the nonprofit community]." Over the years, her staff grew, and so did their ability to offer pro bono services to local nonprofits on a project-by-project basis.

But two years ago, DNA Creative Communications decided to do more. "We truly believe that organizations must have a strong brand in order to accomplish their

individual missions," says Nelson. "It's important to look at the big picture, and have all your communications be a part of an overall strategy, rather than disjointed projects." So, she and her staff launched the Live Here Give Here program, which is a year-long, pro bono partnership for one lucky nonprofit to do just that—develop a strategy in public relations, branding, or social media. Nominations are collected in December, and the following January one organization is selected as the recipient of a full year of free, well-planned services.

In 2010, Live Here Give Here's inaugural year, DNA chose the Alliance for Quality Education. "We took their board members through a rebranding workshop," explains Nelson. "We helped them find a new name—Public Education Partners Greenville County—and designed a brand to better reflect their organization. That was a pretty big undertaking, but we felt like we made a huge impact."

For the 2011 Live Here Give Here program, the DNA team decided on the Cancer Society of Greenville County. "We're spending more than we're bringing in on a monthly basis," says Cancer Society executive director Joyce Boyette. "We need support more than ever." The organization dispenses free nutritional

supplements, medical supplies, and counseling to more than 2,500 cancer patients and their families each year. But amid the struggles of dwindling donations and increased expenses, Boyette's beacon has been DNA Creative Communications. "As a nonprofit we could not afford the dollar amount they have given to us and their expertise," says Boyette. "We are so pleased with everything they have done with us and all of their creative ideas."

The Live Here Give Here application process sparked another creative idea: the annual Shine the Light on Your Nonprofit educational series. In 2010, more than 400 people, representing 130 nonprofits from across the Upstate, participated in DNA's workshops on branding, social media, public relations, and special event planning. The DNA team is wrapping up the 2011 series in November with a PR Boot Camp, after three earlier seminars on event strategies, online communications, and brand consistency. "We are so proud to reach out to so many organizations in our community," describes Nelson of the seminars. "Each leaves empowered . . . ready to implement what they've learned."

For DNA, using their creativity for good is more than a business model. You could say it's in their genes.

By Allison Storm / November 2011