

A TCW Manifesto

As we approach our ten year anniversary, our legs now fully under us and having had the time to establish and define our role in this community and beyond it, we have also found our voice. From a single man, with a single vision with an integral love of children, we are now a team, but more than that we are a family. We are but just a few staff, but we are dozens of volunteers who give of their time and also many hundreds of supporters. All dedicated to this emotionally lucrative work, willing to bear any burden, pay any price, and demonstrate this continuously over all these years.

Our mission is to bridge this digital divide of access to the skills and to the unprecedented educational and communication tools the personal computer and the Internet have become over the past 25 years. We promote and provide equal access leveling the playing field for all in the competition for jobs and education, provide an equal voice in our participatory democracy to all both in our community and beyond, regardless of race, employment or economic status. This work ensures that parents can care for their children and dream the same big dreams for them that we do.

This document serves to project our collective voice to all who are listening.

We are not and have never been looking for handouts, just a hand up like we provide to our clients. We are willing to work very hard for this and we have repeatedly demonstrated that we are willing and able to do exactly that.

We have been involved in the following primary charitable activities:

- Delivering several thousand computers to schools, nonprofits and economically disadvantaged families in this community and beyond (our programs like PCFF, PCFE, PCFDC, PCFY, PCFS, PCFA, PCFB, PCFRC)
- Providing hundreds of hours of phone, email, and carry-in technical support for these units
- Providing several thousand hours of computer skills training to hundreds of families and nonprofit businesses
- Providing thousands of hours of technical computer skills training to many dozens of volunteers
- Diverting hundreds of thousands of pounds of surplus computer equipment from our community landfills
- Providing Internet service to many hundreds of low income families

Our agency has evolved dramatically over time. We have in just these few years:

Transitioned from a personal hobby to an all volunteer group, then to a volunteer group managed by AmeriCorps Vista volunteers, and finally to a volunteer group managed by paid staff. Three active volunteers became dozens and the hundreds who have come and gone over these years. We have transitioned from no employees to now seven of us.

Put in place and maintained a board of directors with a monthly meeting schedule

Put in place a financial accounting system, from no budget to one now approaching a quarter of a million dollars.

Operated out of three different facilities over time, and have grown from 300 sq. ft. to almost 20,000 sq. ft.

Put in place three extensive internal computer network infrastructure domains to support our business operations

Put in place policies and procedures that guide and direct the operations of the business

Put in place a strategic plan for future growth and expansion

Put in place staff and volunteer management systems which continue to evolve and improve

Put in place a customer marketing system which were are still developing

Put in place donation pickup, processing, testing, and warehousing systems

Put in place two fully-equipped extensive computer training labs

Put in place full compliance with State and Federal business requirements

And we have done the following in the past few years to support ourselves in this mission we have undertaken:

Secured contracts with RUSD LSP to provide our services worth many tens of thousands of dollars

Secured contracts with Racine County WDC to provide services worth tens of thousands of dollars

Secured contracts to manage school IT operations worth tens of thousands of dollars

Started a Surplus Outlet Store to provide computer systems for general community

Started an eBay auction sales operation for unusable donated equipment

Started an Internet provider operation with more than 500 customers providing revenue for charitable operations

Started a recycling operation with the landfill diversion of 300 thousand lbs of equipment per year and provides revenues

Started a computer training operation for public and non profit clientele

Hired a full time Executive Director and make payroll and provide health benefits for our community staff twice monthly

When you step back and look at all of this, these are actually remarkable achievements. We don't look for acclaim, just for support to help us do this work and without acknowledgement of the personal and professional sacrifices involved.

Our drive to achieve full sustainability is not yet over, and it may be two or three years away.

We have more work to do on an ever increasing scale and ideas on how to support ourselves to reach our final goal.

We are working on funding a three year program to provide our services across the county

We are working on more contracts to manage school IT operations

We are submitting grant applications monthly

We are in the process of rolling out a wireless broadband Internet initiative and planning another for next year.

We have started planning a data center operation, to help support other nonprofits and generate additional revenue

The key to meeting our challenge is devotion and discipline to what we believe is the 'holy trinity' of accomplishing any goal - people, process and resources. We have come a long way in building a strong foundation of committed, competent people and developing effective, efficient processes. We are now turning our 'vision' to 'reality' through the development of financial and other resources.

We strongly believe funding must be achieved in such a way as to minimize our dependency on outside sources. Given the resources donated to us every day, it is critical to develop earned income from every area in our operation. Only after we have maximized the income from our own capabilities should we ask outside sources for assistance; a tough, but achievable goal that builds long-term strength and balanced partnerships.

The reality for us is this; that the future is bright for us at TCW. We are a non-profit group, run with the efficiencies and profit incentives of a for-profit business, with the mission of a public service agency and the zeal of a social service organization.

Michael F. Pitsch, Executive Director, Tech Corps Wisconsin, Inc. Summer 2005