

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EMPLOYERS OF THIS COMMUNITY

2051 Lathrop Ave.
Racine, WI 53405
262.619.0931



Michael F. Pitsch
Executive Director
executivedirector@tcw.org
www.tcw.org

...putting technology into the hands of tomorrow...

February 21, 2010

Dear Community Employer,

I, along with the Board of Directors as well as the staff and volunteers at Tech Corps Wisconsin, Inc. (TCW) would like a few minutes of your time to outline our organization, present our challenges, and ask you a few questions. This letter serves to project our collective voices to all who are listening.

Tech Corps Wisconsin, Inc. (TCW) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit volunteer organization, founded in 1995, that seeks to bridge the Digital Divide by providing computer and Internet technology access with skills training to children and families.

So our community based mission is to bridge this gap (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 30 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 Is Why We Do What We Do:

In Racine County there were in 2007 approximately 13.9% of the general population living below the poverty level and 6% of the general population living 50% below the poverty level. This is approximately 13,227 people in Racine who are living in poverty. Eighty-four percent of this population is a single-parent household. (Source: <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Racine-Wisconsin.html>). The youth population (ages 0-19) living below fifty percent of the poverty level is 3,262 children. In an Advanced GIS study performed by UW-Parkside students under Professor Zhongwei Liu, it was determined that a large majority of TCW's clients were living in Racine's lowest-income census tracts 1-5. This third-party audit was performed in December, 2006. We estimate that 90% of our current clients are low-income individuals or part of families living below the poverty level.

According to the Racine Literacy Council, Racine County, Wisconsin has second lowest literacy level in the state. 25% of the adult population in Racine or about 35,250 adults are in the lowest level of literacy.

According to the 2003 US Census there are approximately 141,000 adults living in Racine County, Wisconsin. Of these 141,000 adults approximately 23,970 do not have a high school diploma and approximately 11,421 are receiving unemployment compensation.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy, given in 2003 by the Department of Education reveals among other things that:

- 1) No significant increases in U.S. adult literacy from 1992-2003.
- 2) Quantitative literacy skills are higher.
- 3) The results show a strong correlation between literacy and education level attainment
- 4) As literacy increases so does the percentage of the population which is fully employed, adjusting for the state of the economy.
- 5) Median weekly earnings also go up with higher literacy levels.

We were born here in Racine, TCW is the leading local IT CBO, and continue to serve this community as economic conditions deteriorated over these years and unemployment is **now** almost double the now normal rate of 9%. We are but just a few staff, but we are many 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, to make the professional and personal sacrifices necessary and to demonstrate this continuously over all these years.

More Specifically What We Do:

Programs that deliver and fund our mission:

- 1) PC's for Racine County (PCFRC) which is directed at reducing the "digital divide" by placing personal computer systems into the homes of qualifying families along with Internet service, training, and support
- 2) Computer Lab in a Box (CLB) program provides computers for labs in schools, private, public, parochial, and nonprofit orgs.
- 3) PC's for Students (PCFS) program provides qualifying high school and college students with a laptop computer, training/support

Services that deliver and fund our mission:

- 1) Our Surplus Store provides low-cost computer systems to the general public, non-profits, entrepreneurs, and existing businesses
- 2) Low cost computer repair services, upgrade, data transfer, and data recovery services to the general public, schools and non-profit businesses
- 3) Low-cost group and individual training services to the general public who cannot afford the rates offered by private businesses
- 4) Low-cost computer recycling services to the general public, schools, non-profit organizations and businesses
- 5) Our IT Management Services provide for support of computer systems on-site with troubleshooting and repair services

This Is What We Face Now:

There is no other business in SE Wisconsin that collectively provides the type of programs and services I have just outlined. The economy over the past several years has negatively impacted our operations even as we have lowered overhead and dramatically cut costs including staffing. We have lowered our cost recovery prices but are still faced with a reduced ability to deliver our programs and services due to the lack of funds available to those needing our services as well the toll that unemployment has taken on our store customers. As a result, we are facing a budget shortfall of approx. \$50,000.00 (or 20% of our annual budget) in 2010. Your help can assist us to continue our needed work to support the delivery of programs and services and the economy improves but the demand remains in the years ahead.

Over the past 15 years, we have received support from the United Way, Racine Community Foundation, Rotary International, Sienna Center, SC Johnson Company, the Lighted Schoolhouse Program, the Workforce Investment Act, as well as private contributions.

Over these years we have worked with limited success with the City of Racine, Racine County, Gateway Technical College, UW-Parkside, RUSD, RAMAC, and RCEDC, in an effort to form the necessary partnerships to improve our ability to deliver our programs and services. Grant funding is not a viable option in the recent political and economic climates and our current ineligibility due to our self-sustaining focus.

What Help We Are Looking For:

We are not and have never been looking for handouts from anyone, just a hand up like we provide to our clients.

Under our business model, we operate under a self sustaining approach that provides our programs and services on a cost recovery basis, and we only ask for help from others when it is absolutely necessary.

So, now due to our overwhelming need, we have chosen to seek assistance from some of the largest employers in Racine. We need help to sustain our existing infrastructure built over the past 15 years which allows the delivery of our programs & services.

The current economy makes complete self sufficiency for a non-profit such as us nearly impossible. We are seeking to obtain 20% budget funding with 80% remaining as self supporting earned income. We are looking for initial contributions within 60 days or by the end of the first quarter 2010, with ongoing support throughout the 2010-2011 budget years.

Why Should You Care?

This work we do is not about computers, it is about economic equality, social mobility, social equality, participation in our democracy and local economic growth. This work ensures that parents in this community can care for their children and dream big dreams for them.

Our work over these past years delivering our programs and services has positively impacted many thousands of children and families in the Racine area. Many of them are **your employees**, and almost all are in the low income category.

We have been assisting the employers of this community with asset reuse, distribution and recycling for many years now, essentially gratis.

What You Will Get!

We are able to offer you the following menu of benefits for your support:

- 1) An opportunity to engage in strategic corporate citizenship, to make a difference in the community you operate in and your employees live in. Make money while making a difference.
- 2) Computer asset recovery, distribution & recycling
- 3) Seats on our Board of Directors, to assist us in delivering and targeting these programs and services
- 4) Company branding on our website and promotional materials, including mention in press releases

We believe that the key to meeting our challenges is devotion and discipline to the requirements 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 delivery processes. We now seek to turn 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.

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.

I can assure you that without this necessary community based support soon, TCW will need to transition into a very small and limited organization with considerably less than 50% of its current capabilities to deliver these programs and services to the community.

So can we count on you to develop this type of partnership and if so:

1. **How do we get placed into your charitable giving cycle, is there an application process that your company has for us to be considered for donations?**
2. **To whom should we send a packet of information which further explains our organization and provides our full financial details?**

We can work closely with you to flesh out the details of this partnership, both inputs and outcomes, and dependent on a very specific commitment of funds. These contributions are of course tax exempt. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,
Michael F. Pitsch
Executive Director

"Providing the tools and the skills to use them. That's our job at TCW Computers!"