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Charities tighten belts for the winter
by Gideon Marcus
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COAST CITIES — It's going to be a rough winter for North County's charities and nonprofits. A souring economy has cut discretionary spending dramatically, and that means fewer dollars for philanthropic organizations to spread around.

One of the hardest hit is the San Marcos Community Foundation. Formed in 1988, the foundation used the interest from a \$1 million contribution to the city to give out grants four times a year to community programs and organizations. More than 100 groups have been recipients in the past 20 years.

Due to the recent market conditions, the foundation's fund now is worth less than \$1 million. According to legal requirements placed on the foundation, they have suspended the giving of grants until the fund's value is above \$1 million.

This problem isn't unique to San Marcos, and it has caused problems down the money stream. Matt Koumaris, executive director of the Vista Boys & Girls Club, said that the group is still getting good support from individuals in the community.

But the club gets much of its money from family foundations and many of them have stopped giving grants because their investment income has dropped.

For the time being, the club is recruiting more volunteers and trimming some of its outdoor offerings like horse riding and fishing trips.

Ironically, as money gets tighter, nonprofits are being relied on more and more by a poorer community.

"Like other nonprofits, we're busier than ever," Koumaris said. "It's great that our programs are succeeding but we don't have enough funds to make up the difference."

"As you can imagine, we are seeing more patients," Vista Community Clinic's Jenny Jones said. "There are many people that are losing their jobs or their homes and don't know what to do. It is important that when someone loses their insurance, they continue to access medical care."

Direct mail donations to the clinic are down 30 percent and last month's Holiday Homes Tour brought in 20 percent less than last year.

"We haven't had to cut services yet," Jones said. "We are waiting for the state legislators to make decisions about the budget. If their money runs out in February, the clinic will stop getting paid and, instead, receive IOUs."

The Elizabeth Hospice in Escondido, offering hospice care for the terminally ill and counseling for their families, receives funding for its medical programs from the state and federal governments. Those are safe. Other programs like grief support or counseling for children is paid for by private donations — which are down.

Christina Kalberg, public relations officer for the hospice, said that while some of these programs might suffer budget cuts, none were being

“There still are services and support available to people, especially right now,” Kalberg said. “We would encourage everyone in the community to give us a call.”

Information on donating and services provided for the Elizabeth Hospice is available at

www.elizabethhospice.org or by calling (800) 797-2050. The Web site for the Boys & Girls Club of Vista is ww.bgcvista.com and Matt Koumaris can be reached at (760) 724-6606. The Vista Community Clinic is online at www.vistacommunityclinic.org and Jenny Jones can be reached at (760) 631-5000, ext.1418.

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