

BUILDING BLOCKS

THINK Together's monumental growth is discussed in the Orange County Business Journal

Businesses Back Local Nonprofit Offering Kids Tutoring Services

By Jessica C. Lee

A nonprofit that serves kids is expanding thanks to some big names in Orange County and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Santa Ana-based THINK Together, a provider of free after-school tutoring services to kids in poor areas, has seen its revenue go from \$4 million last year to about \$25 million this year, according to Chief Executive Randy Barth.

2002's Proposition 49, the After School Education and Safety Act spearheaded by Schwarzenegger before he became governor, is behind the gain.

THINK Together—the "THINK" stands for Teaching, Helping, Inspiring and Nurturing Kids—also has seen its share of support from businesses.

The Irvine Company's Don Bren alone has given \$1.5 million to the group.

"When we started out, we were privately funded," Barth said. "Most of our funding came from corporate donors in Orange County and wealthy individuals. The government funds are helping us grow even faster now."

THINK Together is one of the few nonprofits to balance government funds and corporate and private donations, according to Betsy Densmore, vice president of the Social Enterprise Institute, an Irvine-based consulting company that works with nonprofits.

"THINK Together has grown so much in such a short amount of time that they truly are an anomaly," she said.

"They've shown a strong commitment to patiently working with the public and private sector, and it's really paying off."

Proposition 49 has given THINK Together a big boost. Before, the nonprofit had tutoring programs at 25 schools in Orange and Los Angeles counties. Now—seven months after getting funding—it's offering after-school

**THINK
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Irvine Company donation: gave \$1 million last year, total of \$1.5 million so far

programs at more than 180 schools in Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Proposition 49 gives THINK Together \$112,500 for each elementary school it works at, and \$150,000 per middle school. The money is helping the group to expand its after-school academic support and homework help programs for at-risk youth from poor areas.

The group's hired about 1,200 part-time and full-time workers since November. THINK Together, which started in 1994, counts about 50 people at its 12,000-square-foot headquarters, according to Barth.

It expects \$25 million in revenue this year. That's up from \$4.5 million last year, according to the Business Journal's most recent list of local nonprofits.

"Last year we had a \$3 million to \$4 million cash budget," Barth said. "It's amazing to see how much we've grown in such a short period of time."

The nonprofit's also planning to buy the entire 25,000-square-foot-building that houses its headquarters, according to Barth.

THINK Together always has had support from local companies and individuals, Barth said.

The list of donors includes some big corporate names:

- Bank of America Corp.'s local operations have given Think Together \$200,000.
- Newport Beach-based Pacific Life Insurance Co. has given \$175,000 through its Pacific Life Foundation.
- Wells Fargo & Co.'s Orange County operations have given \$35,000.
- Disk drive maker Western Digital Corp. in Lake Forest gave \$25,000, while Newport Beach-based Conexant Systems Inc. donated \$15,000.
- Red Mountain Retail Group of Santa Ana has given \$25,000.

Not to mention private contributions, including \$100,000 from Bill Podlich, cofounder of Newport Beach's Pacific Investment Management Co., \$100,000 from Ranney Draper, chairman of Newport Beach-based Spring Creek Investors LLC, and \$50,000 from Knott's Berry Farm heiress Marion Knott.

The Irvine Co.'s been working with THINK Together for the past 10 years, according to Sat Tamaribuchi, vice president of environmental affairs.

"We put a high priority in education at the company and we donate because this program helps children succeed in school," Tamaribuchi said. "It's fulfilling to know that you're helping at-risk children who ordinarily wouldn't have an opportunity to finish high school and go onto college."

Local Funding

Tamaribuchi is one of THINK Together's founding board members. He said the Irvine Co. has helped the nonprofit get state and federal funding and has tried to attract other corporate donors.

THINK Together's board meetings have been held at the Irvine Co.'s offices during the years, he said.

Tamaribuchi said he and the company plan to continue supporting THINK Together. They'd even like to see the group expand and reach out to high school students in the near future, he said.

"I'm glad that they could take our grant and make it a catalyst for their growth and more funding from the private and public sectors," said Kim Burdick, market president for Bank of America Orange County.

The bank has partnered with THINK Together for the past two years, he said.

"Their smart and strategic use of grant money is a model for other nonprofits," Burdick said.

The Pacific Life Foundation has supported the group since 1999, said Michele Myszka, Pacific Life Foundation's vice president. One of the foundation's first grants was used to fund THINK Together's first and full-time development director position, she said.

"The agency's staff, volunteers, and especially Randy Barth have created an exceptional academic after-school program that has positively changed the future of the participants by helping them do well in school," Myszka said.

THINK Together's cause could help local businesses cope with the difficulty of finding educated workers in the future, Social Enterprise's Densmore said.

"It's smart for companies to work with (THINK Together) because they're contributing to a program that could help grow an educated workforce, which could help them find future employees," she said. "It really provides a win-win situation for everybody."

The biggest challenge for THINK Together could be coping with its recent growth while maintaining the quality of its service, Densmore said.

THINK Together's ability to handle its growth could ultimately boil down to finding the right workers and volunteers, she said.

THINK Together targets schools in poor areas or those that don't have money to provide math, English and other tutoring services. Often times, the nonprofit is approached by schools, Barth said.

UC Irvine, Fullerton Volunteers

The group works closely with local universities such as the University of California, Irvine, and California State University, Fullerton, to find volunteers and workers, Barth said.

A big chunk of its volunteers are studying to become social workers or teachers, he said. Many of them become part-time and full-time workers after they graduate, he said.

Cal State Fullerton has more than 150 students volunteer at the nonprofit every year through work-study programs and related course work, according to Jeannie Kim-Han, director of the Center for Internships and Service-Learning.

UC Irvine supplies about 1,000 student volunteers every year, Barth said.

Working with universities gives Barth potential workers for the future, he said.

"Many of these students are recruited for paid positions," Barth said.

Some of the schools' teachers also are tapped, he said.

Part-time workers earn \$11 to \$13 an hour. Full-time site coordinators—those who manage programs at schools in all regions—can make \$32,500 to \$35,000. Area supervisors, who oversee regions—such as Los Angeles or Orange County—make \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year. Its professional staff can make more than \$60,000 a year depending on their educational background and experience.

The nonprofit's also planning to start a high school tutoring service and launch for-profit after-school programs in wealthier school districts, Barth said.