

Pro Bono

~ Covenant House ~

By Steve O'Keefe

Last year, I began donating all the proceeds from in-person sales of my book, *Publicity on the Internet*, to Covenant House of New Orleans. Now that my new book is out, I am expanding my commitment to this charitable organization. In addition to donating money from in-person sales, I've set-up online bookstores benefiting Covenant House (see related article). I'm also hosting a fundraiser for Covenant House at the Book Publishing Management Seminar here in April. I thought you might like to know more about this organization.

Incorporated in 1972, Covenant House is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization dedicated to serving "suffering children of the street." What began as an outreach program helping homeless teens has turned into "the largest private shelter program for homeless kids in the Americas." Last year, Covenant House provided assistance to more than 50,000 youth through centers in 13 U.S. cities and six international locations. They are best known for operating "The Nineline" (800-999-9999) — a nationwide, toll-free number that connects troubled teens with Covenant House services.

Helping homeless teens is not an easy task. These children are caught between horrors at home and predators on the street. Too young for most jobs, ineligible for most government assistance, they lack even the contact information required on job applications and welfare paperwork. They are often forced to choose between returning to a home life they find intolerable, or engaging in illegal activities to get enough money to survive. Covenant House provides an alternative.

Covenant House has learned that the problems of homeless youth are not easily solved. They have expanded from offering shelter to providing health care, drug addiction treatment, counseling, legal services, in-home

services, mother/child care, and job training. At the helm of Covenant House is the spirited Sister Mary Rose McGeady, a tough-talking, no-nonsense advocate of children's rights. Her speech at the 2000 candlelight vigil held by Covenant House in Times Square will not only convince you of her sincerity, it's also a good example of how to use streaming media at your web site. You'll find the speech at http://www.covenanthouse.com/who_video.html.

At the Patron Saint Productions web site, you'll find more information about Covenant House, including links to a Better Business Bureau evaluation of the charity and the IRS' Form 990 detailing how the group raises and spends funds.



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My one qualm about recommending Covenant House is that their direct mail fundraising is frequent and unimaginative. Thankfully, they've never sold my contact information to others, but their own prolific pitch letters have all the appeal of a used car salesperson's spiel. They should take more care with the marketing message.

Covenant House could boost credibility with donors by sending fewer solicitations and having them written by staff instead of hardened fundraising sharks. These flaws are easy to ignore, however, in light of the vital work Covenant House does and the economical way they manage their affairs.



Follow-Up: AKA: DOC

Last month, we wrote about a *pro bono* campaign for a book called *AKA: DOC* (Cadence Jazz Books). We formatted an excerpt as a "Feature Article" and offered it to 22 web sites. Within a few days, six sites responded that they would use the feature. Here's some feedback:

"You are our lead story as of noon..."
Gary Dauphin, Editor, **Zyde.com:**
The Magazine for Louisiana Music

"Could you edit this down to essentially the middle 'Busking' section ... with ordering info...at the bottom?"
Jim, **Performers.net**

"In order to reprint any copyrighted material, I must have permission..."
Paula Edelstein,
Manager of Content Development
Sounds of Timeless Jazz.com

Commentary: Naturally, we secured advance permission to use the excerpt, and we passed the permission letter along to Paula. We often get requests to tone down the marketing copy, and we gladly did so for Jim. Gary ran the feature without changes.

We seeded discussion groups with offers to send the excerpt, and have received about 50 requests so far (and *no flames*). Here are the groups where we posted messages:

NEWSGROUPS:

alt.books
alt.music.misc
neworleans.general
rec.arts.books
rec.music.makers.saxophone
rec.music.makers.trumpet
rec.music.promotional

MAILING LISTS:

aJAZZlist
ALLMUSIC
AllThatJazz
Discovering-New-And-Old-Jazz
jazz-concepts
jazz-l (Jazz Lovers' List)
jazzplayers
NewOrleans
nolalife
satchmo-discuss