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**JERRY BOONE**

## Helping agency in need finds friends aplenty

**Y**ou can forgive Jeri Alcock if she sounds a bit like an Academy Award winner.

"I'd like to thank Bill and Melinda Gates . . . and Columbia Community Bank . . . and Keith Green. And, well, there are just so many of them."

You never know who your friends are 'til you really need them.

But let's go back to the beginning.

When last winter's storm ripped a 100-foot gash in the roof of Community Action's 9-year-old Hillsboro building, agency officials discovered it was decaying from the inside.

For years, the agency has been available to people looking for help with rent or help with their kids. It runs pregnancy, early child care and after-school programs; it helps people find a home or get the one they have insulated. It provides clothing for people in need and referral services for those who don't know where to turn.

Now, it was the helpers who needed help.

Insurance covered the roof but wouldn't pay for what workers discovered in the walls. The insulation was ruined. The windows were shot. Many of the wall studs were rotting after years of water leaking on them.

Community Action's leaders are mulling their legal options against the designer and builder, but they aren't optimistic there is anything they can do.

So organizers put out a call for help, tapping both the local community and major benefactors, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

A \$100,000 check from the Gates Foundation will go a long way toward paring down the \$800,000 cost of rebuilding the structure. However, hundreds of thousands of dollars are owed.

"Normally if you need to raise that kind of money you have a year or more to get ready," says Alcock, Community Action's director of development and community relations.

However, says Jerralynn Ness, Community Action's executive director, "Once we saw what was going on inside the walls, we really had no choice. It wasn't something that could wait."

For the Gates Foundation, \$100,000 is a pittance, but for Rob Obrist, who owns Alpha Energy Savers, his \$1,700 in material represents a major gift.

It also indicates how Community Action is seen in its home town.

"Times have been tough the past few years," Obrist says. "We had to dig down deep to come up with that size of donation, and we certainly don't do it for many people. We just can't afford it."

"But they are such good people. We just had to help," the Hillsboro businessman says.

"It is that response that reminds me about the value of what we do," Ness says.

"There were a lot of people who helped put the building up 10 years ago, and they were just furious at what happened to it," she says.

Stimson Lumber donated \$2,000 worth of lumber. Rick's Fasteners dropped off \$350 in wood screws. De-Temple Heating and Cooling showed up with \$2,500 worth of dirty cars and trucks for a fund-raising car wash.

And the Winston Co. of Beaverton dropped off almost seven miles of duct tape — a couple hundred rolls — to seal the building during remodeling.

"But everyone knows you can fix anything with duct tape," says Winston's Matt Coppo, "so it probably got used for other things, too."

The biggest single donation came from Keith Green Construction, which donated \$25,000 in labor.

And when it was all done, Alpha Building Maintenance showed up with \$450 worth of instant lawns to repair the sod damaged during the project.

"I looked out the window, and I saw this truckload of lawn," Alcock says. "It was pretty amazing support from beginning to end."

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