Pictured left to right: Dress for Success Cincinnati CEO, Julie Smith-Morrow, and Advancement Director, Lisa McDaniel Brown, ATC Co-Founder and Managing Partner, David Goodwin and Lauri Goodwin.

A PARTNERSHIP GIVING WOMEN A HAND UP

Written by Rick Bird · Photography by Daniel Smyth

It started as an every day business transaction. David Goodwin, managing partner and co-founder of Advanced Technology Consulting, Inc., worked with Dress for Success Cincinnati (DfSC) to design the organization's telecommunications needs.

Soon that relationship would blossom into a partnership indicative of the good things business people can do when they take the responsibility of civic leadership seriously and give back to the community.

"David became very interested in the work we do," says Julie Smith-Morrow, CEO of Dress for Success Cincinnati. "I think he liked that our programs are not a handout, but a hand up. We expect accountability from our clients."

Dress for Success is a global nonprofit organization in 140 cities and 19 countries that promotes the economic independence of disadvantaged women by providing professional attire and a network of career development and support tools. The Cincinnati affiliate, founded in 1999, has become one of the most successful, serving more than 14,000 women in a 12-county area the last 16 years.

"David asked if we had any men on our board of directors," says Smith-Morrow. "I said, 'Well, no, but what a great idea.' "

Goodwin became the first male board member of the Cincinnati affiliate two years ago. He laughs that, "There was a certain appeal to working with an entire female board of directors."

His wife, Lauri Goodwin, agrees. "It was good for him. It helps to be around a female point of view," pointing out that David had his share of "locker room" culture as a professional baseball player in the Chicago Cubs organization. Lauri has also been active with DfSC by organizing and hosting ongoing clothing drives out of her home.

"I think many men have found themselves increasingly supportive of women's issues and realize it helps make communities stronger when women do well," says Smith-Morrow. "David brings a fabulous perspective on things like tactical execution and cost-benefit analysis. Men and women are different, but very complementary in these kind of settings."

"I felt Dress for Success Cincinnati was really good at paying it forward," Goodwin says. "It works with ladies who want to take control of their lives. They do a great job of equipping them with skill sets like networking, resume building and interviewing."

Dress for Success in Greater Cincinnati serves nearly 1,700 underprivileged women a year. Women are referred by dozens of regional public and private social service agencies that have previously qualified the women for the type of help DfSC can offer.

Dress for Success usually starts with outfitting a woman in professional attire, often complete with accessories like jewelry and purses. But the program extends to a comprehensive job readiness course. A nine-week DfSC session helps with resume writing, interviewing and overcoming other job barriers. Indeed, being "dressed for success" becomes an attitude as much as securing some smart clothing.

"We help women build their self-confidence," says Smith-Morrow. "They are transformed so they are not only employed, but economically independent."

After the client finds a job, she can become part of the Professional Women's Group designed to provide further counseling on work-life balance, financial literacy and opportunities for leadership development that can include becoming mentors for other women.

DfSC receives funding from a variety of public and private sources, including corporate and foundation grants and individual donations. Cincinnati is the only Dress for Success affiliate that has a retail outlet with profits put back into the organization. Its Portaluca stores, downtown and in College Hill, sell excess donations of new and gently used clothing, shoes and accessories.

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The largest single fundraising event for the group is its annual Fashion Show, scheduled for September 10 at Horseshoe Casino, with models and clothing from Saks Fifth Avenue. It also features DfSC clients on the runway modeling the professional attire they were provided, including voiceovers telling their stories in their own words. Several ATC employees help with the event and serve on the organizing committee.

Dress for Success Cincinnati is one of 16 nonprofit organizations that receive donations from ATC and its employees each year. Once a year the company takes a team to Matthew 25: Ministries for a volunteer effort.

Goodwin began working with DfSC as its first male board member in 2013.

"None of the community endeavors are mandatory for our employees, but I strongly encourage it," says Goodwin, a graduate of a Jesuit high school in Indianapolis and Xavier University. "I think it's a common thread when you have that kind of education to give back to the community. And, as you get older, you realize those of us who have been blessed to lead a productive, fruitful life should give back."

Goodwin, with partner Darren DeMartino, founded ATC in 1999 as a broker for telecommunications services. It soon evolved into a comprehensive consulting firm that provides a strategic view of integrated voice, data, wireless and telecommunications needs for more than 250 clients and thousands of locations nationwide.

Goodwin has received several business awards for the company's growth, but the one he cherishes is a recent Pillar award for outstanding community service from Smart Business magazine.

"A business honor for growth is nice, but really that's about the company. This kind of award is what we did to help someone else. I'm just trying to do my thing where community involvement and civic leadership becomes a part of our culture."

Smith-Morrow finds it similarly gratifying to help the less privileged. She switched careers 16 years ago, leaving the academic world as a geneticist in plant molecular biology to work for Goodwill Industries, then she was VP at the Freestore Foodbank for eight years before moving to the Dress for Success Cincinnati leadership role in 2012.

"It is rewarding," she says. "Almost every single day we can count the number of women whose lives we have positively affected." ❖

Dress for Success Cincinnati is located at 205 West Fourth Street, Suite 900, Cincinnati, OH 45202.You can reach them at 513.651.3372 or visit their website at www.dfscincy.org.

Advanced Technology Consulting, Inc. (ATC) is located at 6792 Heritage Club Drive, Mason, OH 45040. You can reach them at 513.234.4778 or visit their website at www.4atc.com. See the ATC ad on page ##

Photo by Tori Lowry of Lowry Photography
The DfSC annual fashion show features clients shown here as well Saks Fifth Avenue models.