

Check under classic hoods for big-hearted engines of charity

David Flaum

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Sure, Alpha Omega Veterans Services' classic car and bike show last Saturday brought in some cash.

The \$9,000 raised -- the best yet for the show -- will help the nonprofit agency, especially in its housing programs.

But the impact is broader than that, said Cordell Walker, Alpha Omega's executive director.

"It helps when you can show your sponsors and supporters when you're trying to gain self-sufficiency financially that you can raise money," he said.

"It's not only money, but at this stage, it's notoriety in the good sense," said Larry Tifverman, a retired Army man who also worked for United Way of the Mid-South and has been an Alpha Omega board member for 16 years. Some directors had classic cars, so they decided to start a show, he said. The 25 to 50 cars in the first years grew to 121 this year.

"Anyone who brings a car is a potential donor," Tifverman said. "They also spread the word about the organization." That buzz has gotten to the corporate world. This year, Valero Energy, Memphis Area Teachers Credit Union, United Way of the Mid-South -- Alpha Omega is a United Way agency -- and SunTrust Bank were sponsors of the event.

For SunTrust, the relationship with the 20-year-old Alpha Omega goes back to the National Bank of Commerce days, said Josalyn Tresvant, marketing specialist with SunTrust. Alpha Omega had accounts and other business dealings with NBC, which SunTrust acquired in 2004. That made the bankers aware of the agency's program, Tresvant said. "It fit within our (SunTrust) foundation model of supporting family, arts and the community," she said. "It's just unique for any other organization we work with in the service they provide."

Alpha Omega finds housing, gets counseling and gives other aid such as food and clothing to veterans, including those with mental, substance abuse or money problems. Sponsorship of the car show goes beyond businesses.

The six-year-old Southern Classic Cruisers anted up \$600 for a sponsorship this year and members brought cars to the show, said Gary Beilby, who showed off his 1948 International pickup.

"As many of us go every year as we can because a lot of us are vets," he said. The club adopted Alpha Omega for its first-quarter fundraising, getting cash from bake sales, yard sales, cookouts and cruise-ins, he said.

"We see the need for people who have been in the service," Beilby said. "The government can only give so much for their care and they have needs the government doesn't pay for. That's what Alpha Omega is all about."

ALPHA OMEGA VETERANS SERVICES

Headquarters: 1183 Madison

Top person: Cordell Walker, executive director

Business: Nonprofit agency that provides services to veterans, including housing and counseling, in programs that range from 30 days to two years.

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