

Pfizer's generosity will be a hard - but inspiring - act to follow By Susan Katz Froning, Ann Arbor resident

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Since the announcement of Pfizer's departure, I've heard many expressions of concern about our nonprofit community. The concern is well founded - the deep impact of the company's generosity is truly remarkable. Clearly, the absence will be strongly felt - well beyond Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County.

I can't help but feel overwhelmed when thinking of the multiple community resources that may disappear as Pfizer's departure begins. Its contributions are wide ranging and include the obvious (\$4 million plus in local financial contributions) and the not-so-obvious (nonprofit board volunteers, record numbers of operational volunteers, in-kind services such as printing and graphic design, educational programming, direct monetary contributions from Pfizer employees, and the list goes on). Despite the great loss, I have confidence that our local nonprofit community will remain strong.

My confidence comes from the knowledge that our nonprofits are in good hands - our nonprofit leaders are bright, dedicated and resourceful. They are resilient - remember, Pfizer's departure comes after a wave of numerous financial challenges for the nonprofit sector: multiple years of a bad economy, cuts in government funding, declining contributions from the automotive industry, and competition with natural disasters.

My confidence also relies upon the belief that our community will respond to support our local nonprofits. Nonprofits are being included in the planning for "life beyond Pfizer." Our nonprofit leaders are involved in discussions regarding plans for response to Pfizer's departure, and that's an important inclusion. Solutions are more creative if everyone is involved in the conversation rather than being the subject of the conversation.

My confidence also relies upon the hope that we will see increased individual involvement in our community. We can use this opportunity to think reflectively about our stake in and support of nonprofits, and more importantly, our support for those that our nonprofit community serves.

Stepping in, even when we may feel uncertain about our own personal situations, is critical to the health of our community.

Finally, as our attention turns toward community solutions and future plans, let's pause and thank Pfizer and its employees. Closure of the Ann Arbor facility teaches valuable lessons - in familiar terms, we can't put all our eggs in one basket, and good things don't always last forever. These are great lessons for our nonprofit community, our community at large and each one of us as individuals.

Most importantly, we need to thank Pfizer, loudly and publicly, for its incredible generosity. Under the passionate leadership of David Canter, Pfizer and its employees have set the bar high and will leave a hard (but inspiring) act to follow. Thank you for being a role model - we hope to carry on in a way that honors and grows your investment in our community.

To contribute essays to Other Voices, contact Mary Morgan, opinion editor, at 734-994-6605 or mmorgan@annarbornews.com.

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