

Philanthropy Matters

All About OREEF Employee Emergency Fund



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Outreach from Members after a recent high-profile tragedy that impacted employees calls for the Foundation to shine a light on one of our most meaningful programs -- Ocean Reef Employee Emergency Fund (OREEF). OREEF has consistently served the employee community under the radar for 20 years.

The express purpose is to provide confidential assistance to Ocean Reef employees, with dignity and without fanfare, during personal crisis situations resulting in financial hardship. Dozens of OREEF grants, between one and three most years, have been quietly distributed since 2006.

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According to Ocean Reef Club VP of Human Resources Laura Ciampa, whose team offers a full complement of competitive benefits, "OREEF grants are one of the most important and unique offerings available to our Club Associates. Our Members' generosity

through OREEF has helped prevent Associate families from experiencing financial distress over unexpected emergency expenses and helped us to support and retain valued Associates through life's most difficult times."

Full-time, year-round employees with a year or more of service to Ocean Reef Club or the Ocean Reef Community Association are eligible to submit an application through their respective Human Resources department documenting their crisis and need. Past employees who have exhausted leave and left for health reasons are eligible as well. Several grants have been made to provide COBRA coverage to maintain health insurance in such cases. The fund has also covered funeral expenses. OREEF applications are anonymous and reviewed by a small committee through an expedited process for a quick response, usually in a day or two.

Crisis situations considered under the OREEF guidelines include fire, loss of property, loss of spouse's income, accident/injury/illness or death in the immediate family and employee accident/injury/illness or death. The most common requests are usually just a few thousand dollars but range upward depending on the circumstances and need. The heartfelt "thank you" cards found in our OREEF file make clear that extra help at a critical moment has made a world of difference to the recipients.

The select few on the Club's HR team who handle applications have seen the impact personally. Ciampa reports, "Our Associates who have benefitted from OREEF are infinitely grateful for this resource. The whole idea that, as their employer, we are able to facilitate this assistance because our Members care so deeply about their families and well-being, is one of the aspects of working for ORC that makes

me most proud."

Ciampa also appreciates that "The program is designed to provide assistance to Associates who have exhausted other avenues to rectify their own situation." Because the guidelines require that they do so, the program has helped HR connect employees to vital resources. These referrals are often to nonprofit organizations funded by the Foundation's Community Grants program, also thanks to Member generosity.

OREEF was initially established with joint donations by the Foundation, Club and ORCA, and has largely been sustained over the years by proceeds from the Foundation's share of All Charities, as well as private donations from community members and organizations.

While online fundraisers such as "GoFundMe" provide a new option to give directly to individuals, there are some drawbacks. As you may be aware, donations designated to benefit specific individuals are not tax-deductible, and crowdsourcing platforms do not offer the accountability required of IRS qualified charities. OREEF continues to offer a traditional charitable giving option for those who prefer it.

In the case of OREEF, tax-deductible donations can be made to benefit the broad charitable class of ORC and ORCA employees ahead of a crisis (the ORCA umbrella actually extends the program to employees of Ocean Reef's Foundation, Cultural Center, Chapel, Art League, Chamber, ORCAT and more). While a gift to OREEF cannot be designated for a particular employee, it does ensure that there are funds available to support employees who apply and qualify going forward. Contributions can be made by check with "OREEF" in the memo written to Ocean Reef Community Foundation, 35 Ocean Reef Drive, Suite 148, Key Largo, FL 33037.