BEST OF MIAMI
AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE FUTURE OF THE NEW NORMAL
in recovery mode

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Even in a forced shutdown, employers devised ways to help cushion their workers

BY ABRAHAM GALVAN

Even after the pandemic forced organizations and businesses to shut down, employers left the doors open for their employees, taking into play their needs and sense of security.

When Goodwill South Florida, which employs 3,100 people, had to close all of its stores, its apparel manufacturing division and other key parts of the business, the nonprofit had no choice but to furlough over 2,800 employees temporarily, said Eileen Ball Mehta, a partner at Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod LLP.

Goodwill South Florida’s vice president of marketing, development and communication Lourdes De La Mata-Little reactivated the board of directors and team and quickly organized a Covid Emergency Fund for Goodwill South Florida by engaging the media and Goodwill supporters.

The effort raised over $350,000 in less than six weeks to help those employees most affected, Ms. Ball Mehta added.

The covid employee emergency fund went directly to the most critically affected individuals who suffered from food insecurity or were struggling to make ends meet, Ms. De La Mata-Little said.

“One of the things we did with the funds was to at least continue to offer health insurance for our employees, even though they were furloughed, because these are people with disabilities that have medical needs,” she said.

With 34 stores in Broward and Miami-Dade counties, Ms. De La Mata-Little said Goodwill South Florida is in recovery mode. “We are trying to pick up the pieces. We’re still trying to see if we can somehow leverage with getting some kind of federal aid and trying to see how we can fit into this and get some help,” she said.

With the reopening of the stores, furloughed employees are starting to come back, Ms. De La Mata-Little, just shy of still about 500 employees from getting back to where they were before the pandemic.

“The best thing about Goodwill and the more important piece of the puzzle is that we provide an opportunity for people to belong. Many times people with disabilities, they’re not included,” she said. “Goodwill provides them a sense of purpose. We provide an opportunity for them to have a reason to get up in the morning and be a contributing member of the community, and that really makes all the difference.”

Surviving and getting through the shutdown, Coral Gables’ Stephanie Crepes is normally the first stepping stone and job experience for many high school-age locals trying to learn a work ethic and discipline, said Stephanie Cheung.

“The youth is also part of the community and can contribute in so many ways. That’s why I want to be there for them and guide them towards the right path and follow their dreams,” she said. “They’re all very hungry and determined.”

Goodwill South Florida’s board and team quickly organized a Covid Emergency Fund to help employees.

Stephanie Cheung of Stephanie Crepes wanted to be there to help her young workers through the crisis.

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