

Give yourself this Christmas

If you are not one of those people who is already done with your Christmas shopping, Pontis has a good opportunity for you – a unique chance to give your loved ones an original Christmas present and fulfill your philanthropic desire to do something good for Slovakia at the same time.

If you contribute €10 to the portal supporting Slovak NGOs at www.dobrakrajina.sk and send a picture before December 16, you will receive a caricature with which you can surprise your loved ones.

You can join people like Táňa Palhoffová and Mišo Kaščák, who have been connected with the Great Country program since its establishment three years ago. As members of the Board of Trustees, along with Tomáš Janovic, Jarmila Lajčáková and Ján Orlovsky, they have helped guarantee that the NGOs selected for donor support are credible.

The result? Within three years, 135 projects have been supported. Thanks to people like you, the DePaul shelter for the homeless can serve 180 breakfasts daily, the Nezábudka Association can offer music therapy to 32 handicapped people and teach them to play "For Elisabeth", five refugees can study Slovak, and many others can benefit in similar ways.

Give Your Company an Award

Giving to the Great Country program is something that you can do as an individual, but there is more that you can do. Do you want everyone to know how proud you are of the company you work for? Here is your chance! On January 17, the Pontis Foundation will open the nomination process for the 2012 Via Bona Awards. The prize categories are: Corporate Responsibility awards – Green Company, Great Employer, and Pro-Customer Company; Philanthropy awards – Supporter of Volunteering and Great Partner of a Community; and the Main Awards – Responsible Large Corporation, and Responsible SME.

It has not been an easy decision, but we decided to leave out some of the award categories this year. In particular, the ethics category was difficult to eliminate. However, after hours of discussion with committee members, and with many of you, we concluded that ethical behavior is one of the key values that business must contribute to today's societal turmoil. As such, it is one of the key criteria in each of the categories, especially for companies aspiring to take the top place.

Give Our Society a Chance for Transparency

To demonstrate how important it is to protect transparency and ethics today, corporations from the Business Leaders Forum initiated the establishment of the Fund for a Transparent

Slovakia. The goal of the fund is to bring added value to Slovak citizens via projects aimed at control of corruption, clientelism, ineffective public spending, or misuse of power. Západoslovenská energetika, Slovenské elektrárne, Slovak Telekom, Heineken Slovensko, Accenture, Embraco Slovakia and Slovalco have all contributed. The Fund's launch was also supported by British Ambassador Susanne Montgomery, American Ambassador Theodore Sedgwick, Dutch Ambassador Daphne Bergma, and Norwegian Ambassador Trine Skymoien.

An independent committee comprised of experts in the fields of sociology, media, and NGOs selected four NGOs out of eleven applicants. Over €50,300 will be distributed among these four NGOs. The committee, along with having a strong vision of the organizational courage it takes to protect the interests of citizens, also looked at how the projects will contribute to the applying organizations' programmatic sustainability.

Among those awarded were Via Iuris and the Alliance Fair Play, organizations that together recognize courageous citizens and whistle blowers with the White Crow award. Via Iuris also helps advocate citizens' rights in making local and national governments accountable. Alliance Fair Play also brings media attention to cases of ineffective use of public finances, infringement of citizens' rights, or situations in judiciary.



The third organization supported, Transparency International, focuses on evaluating governmental steps in fighting corruption and on public procurement. The Health Policy Institute was the last NGO chosen. It will use the support of the Fund to analyze the waiting lists for health procedures and corruption in the Slovak health system.

The Fund demonstrates a very natural alignment of individual and corporate values that public opinion research by the Business Leaders Forum shows to be in increasing demand by employees of corporations.

Keep on Giving...

As there is never a better time to look back at the year that is passing and make New Year's resolutions, there is one more thing to mention, though it is not about money or public recognition on a stage. In the end, when it comes to philanthropy what is more important is how it makes you feel and what impact it has. And for that the year offers hundreds of opportunities to volunteer time, talent, or expertise. Members of the Group Engage, which is administered by the Pontis Foundation, educate themselves on how to make volunteering effective and fun at the same time. The group also co-organizes Our Town – the largest corporate volunteering project in Central Europe. Slovak NGOs look forward to partnering with hundreds of volunteers during this event. The volunteers benefit by meeting other committed citizens, learning about social causes, and seeing those they help. That's worth it, is it not?



*Lenka Surotchak,
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