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Primerus Community Service

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Creating Community: Dunlap Coddling's Approach to Community Service

"Community doesn't need a place... but it doesn't hurt to have one." Beginning with this simple concept, Dunlap Coddling is redefining what it means to be a law firm actively engaged in the Oklahoma City community.

In February 2013, Dunlap Coddling, Oklahoma's oldest and largest intellectual property boutique law firm, moved into its new offices at 609 W. Sheridan Avenue in the historic Film Row District of Oklahoma City. During



the prior year the firm purchased a 1920s warehouse in the Film Row District – an area called “skid row” as recently as five years prior and which is now a blossoming arts and innovation area of the city – and renovated the building into 15,000 square feet of office space. In developing the space, the shareholders’ vision was to add to the unique character and flavor of the Film Row District by incorporating community oriented areas and space – a concept that the firm’s community

clients indicated was sorely lacking in Oklahoma City.

In keeping with this vision, the building’s design incorporated more than 2,000 square feet of open space for use by the firm’s employees and community. A significant portion of one parking lot was bulldozed and converted into an outdoor courtyard featuring built-in seating and shaded areas for musicians and artists to congregate. The courtyard is connected to the interior kitchen and event space through the use of a large commercial glass overhead door which floods the interior areas with light and fresh air. All of the furniture and fixtures are on wheels to facilitate repurposing the space to meet the unique and individualized needs of the innovators, creators and artists within Oklahoma City. The space has even been given a persona – DC on Film Row – and has, of course, its own website (www.dcfilmrow.com) and Twitter and Facebook personas.

The firm isn’t content with simply providing the space; groups and organizations within the community are offered use of the space for free. As shareholder Douglas Sorocco said, “We wanted to be a good neighbor to everyone within the community. We wanted to create a ‘place’ in which people could get together and work to make things better. Everyone and anything that brings the community together is invited to use the space. Our only rule is nothing that divides. As we say, if you’d like to use the space for an event, just ask, and we’ll

probably say yes.” Depending on the circumstances and on the type of event or organization using the space, the firm provides use of its kitchen amenities, including free use of the soda, coffee, and water/ice machines.

As an effort to reach out to everyone in the community, the firm partnered this last summer with a local church to open the space to the homeless population living in downtown Oklahoma City. The church provided food while Dunlap Coddling contributed beverages, paper products and the staffing to facilitate the event. Upon seeing the need, firm members rallied by seeking out and obtaining articles of clothing, hygiene items, backpacks and suitcases from throughout the community and provided these items to their homeless guests. The firm’s kitchen, social area, and courtyard were open from 5 until 8 p.m. so that those attending could relax and escape the brutal Oklahoma City summer heat, mingle, charge their cell phones, and eat dinner in an atmosphere of inclusion and community. Dunlap Coddling will resume this service to the homeless again in the spring and has actively sought support and involvement from others in the Oklahoma City business community.

Dunlap Coddling started “Food Truck Wednesdays” as another means of creating community and bringing our neighbors together. The firm arranges for a local food truck to be on site for lunch, hires local emerging musicians to play



for the crowd, and opens its courtyard and kitchen/lounge as an impromptu neighborhood networking space. The firm is also a sponsor of “Premiere on Film Row,” a monthly Art Walk/Street Festival, and provides its community space to local artists and musicians. As part of Premiere, Dunlap Coddling partners with a community organization to orchestrate family-friendly events, such as bounce houses in August, an innovative science instruction “parklet” in September, and a haunted house in October. All of these occasions are not simply a way of drawing the community together, but also serve as opportunities for members of the firm to rally together and work as a team. The recent haunted house was a particular team effort as attorneys and staff carved pumpkins, turned the interior of the firm into a frightening haunted Asylum, dressed as zombies, and created a terrifying experience for the children and parents of the community.

IgniteOKC, a fast paced speaking event originally started and sponsored by Dunlap Coddling in Oklahoma City, was one of the first community creative groups to make use of the firm’s hospitality, holding its board and planning meetings on site over the course of several weeks leading up to IgniteOKC 5. The firm also hosted a leadership and training meeting and party for the students during the

deadCenter Film Festival. Dunlap Coddling served as command central and headquarters for the volunteers and staff running the OKC Pride Parade. Oklahoma City’s Chamber of Commerce held a monthly Sunset Reception networking event on site recently. OHM Space – a “hackerspace,” a pre-incubator setting where tinkerers/creators can use manufacturing equipment that would otherwise be too costly to use – also holds its planning and board meetings at Dunlap Coddling.

Other recent events sponsored or hosted by the firm include:

- Oklahoma County Youth Services benefit to raise money for an apartment and school complex for the homeless
- Canterbury Choral Society’s VIP after-party
- Individual Artists of Oklahoma (IAO) Gallery’s Red Dot Recharged VIP Party, an upcoming event to benefit the Gallery
- OKC Talk (Oklahoma’s largest talk forum and community website)
- Wedding receptions, baby showers and other family oriented events that require a space to gather and strengthen commitments and ties

The firm’s employees form bonds and have fun as they collaborate to host and participate in these varied events. Networking opportunities abound. Of

course, Dunlap Coddling also gives back to its profession and the community in more traditional ways, such as by volunteering time and donating money to causes and initiatives. The firm has found, however, that providing a place for the community – for everyone in the community – to gather is oftentimes greater than the sum of both money and time.

Dunlap Coddling, like the Hawaiian missionaries of old who “came to do good



and did well,” thrives by supporting all of its neighbors, the creative community and the community at large. For a firm in the business of helping clients protect their reputations, inventions and brands, the small step of opening its doors and inviting people into its space has been a way to give (and receive the blessings of giving) organically. **P**