



Berry Brewer  
f r e e l a n c e

Sample post from CharitableThoughts:

### **Each Drop of Water Is Precious: How a Tiny Idea Can Make a Big Difference**

Today's highlighted charity should be a real inspiration to those of us who believe that one or two individuals really can make a difference in the world. The creation of WaterPartners International is the story of two graduate students who combined their expertise and passions to improve the lives of thousands of people in hundreds of communities around the world.

Marla Smith-Nilson and Gary White met as Engineering students at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. In 1990 they created a project that provided safe drinking water to a small community in Honduras. Their nonprofit organization was incorporated three years later, and as of today it has made a difference in more than 200 communities.

From the WaterPartners site:

"Each day, more than a billion people in developing countries must walk long distances to get the water they need for drinking, cooking and bathing. Often, this water is contaminated. WaterPartners helps people in developing countries obtain safe drinking water and basic sanitation (toilets). Working in partnership with those in need, WaterPartners has transformed more than 200 communities in eight countries - Bangladesh, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Guatemala, India, Kenya, and the Philippines - with access to a safe, reliable source of water and basic sanitation."

It is nearly impossible for those of us in more-developed nations to even comprehend the idea of having to walk for miles and miles only to carry home a bucket of dirty water that will be sparingly used for cooking, drinking, and cleaning until we make the miles-long journey the next day. When you consider the fact that much of this limited supply is contaminated, it is hard not to become indignant. Thank goodness there are organizations like WaterPartners that are helping communities bring this invaluable resource to their citizens.

A final note on the good work done by this group: WaterPartners really lives up to both parts of their name. They make the local community a partner in the process. To do this, the community is involved in the planning, building, and maintenance of the water system. It's not something that is merely given to them, but something that they help create for the betterment of the population. A lot of education and skill-building accompanies the projects.

### **An Eco Town in America's Heartland**

There's something both terrifying and invigorating about starting with a clean slate. The residents of Greensburg, Kansas have experienced both ends of this spectrum, along with everything in between, since a tornado ripped their city apart back in May of 2007. Ten people died, and 1,400 were displaced.

The devastation of losing one's home can not be compared to any other type of loss. When your clothes, your belonging, your photos are simply gone, it can be impossible to imagine how you might move forward. When you had very little to begin with, this loss can seem even greater.

Greensburg was not a prosperous city before the tornado, and it certainly could have sunk lower after Mother Nature's rage. Instead, however, the city is using this opportunity for a fresh start. Rebuilding has begun, but with a twist. Greensburg is looking to become one of the "greenest" cities in America. With a name like that, it seems only fitting!

The movement is being supported by a nonprofit group called Greensburg Greentown, and they have helped ensure that new housing has been built that meets Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (or LEED) gold standards. City buildings will be built to LEED platinum standards. There is such beautiful symmetry to a town destroyed by a tornado rising up and harnessing the wind through windmills to create electricity. "Maybe it's a little crazy," says city manager Steve Hewitt. "There's only 14 platinum buildings in the country. When it's all said and done, I'd like four or five here in Greensburg."

What does the change mean for a city like Greensburg? First of all, the town's sustainability is a model for other cities around the world. Theoretically, the citizens will face lower utilities costs, too, as their homes and public buildings become more efficient. As a bonus, this once-struggling town has now gained international attention, including the filming of a television show for the Discovery Channel. It was once thought that Greensburg was a dying town, one where the youth graduated, left town, and never returned. Now there's a different feeling in the air.

While it's all an experiment, there's a chance that Greensburg will rise better than ever from the tornado's destruction.

Sample Post from WinterWalks:

### **Taking on Winter in Portland's Forest Park**

Portland has its own distinct take on winter. Whereas neighbors to the north experience heavy snowfalls and those to the south enjoy a moderately warm season, Portland's sky broods over being the middle child. Winter sees a lot of low-hanging clouds, gray days, and an oft-present drizzling rain. The residents don't let the weather stop them, though, and most throw on waterproof jackets and head about their usual activities. As a very outdoor-oriented city, this often involves biking, hiking, and enjoying a variety of other interests.

For those seeking to experience a little nature with their rain, Forest Park is a wonderful choice. The area is first described in the writings of Lewis and Clark during their exploration of the Pacific Northwest in 1803. For nearly the first half of the 1900s, the city of Portland worked to try and designate the land as Forest Park. They were finally successful in 1948, and Oregonians (and visitors) have been able to enjoy this marvelous tract of forested land ever since.

A visitor to Forest Park can expect to be greeted by dozens of bird varieties. In fact, the Audubon Society of Portland has a wildlife sanctuary adjacent to the land with more than four miles of trails of its own. The park itself, however, has more than 70 miles of trails to explore! Much of the lush forest is made up of old-growth trees that reach upward to create a beautiful green canopy. The undergrowth is equally as lush, and it is easy to imagine that you are in the very same spot decades before Europeans set foot in the area.

The park itself overlooks the Willamette River and covers approximately 5,000 acres. This makes it the largest wooded city park in the entire nation. It is part of the 40-Mile Loop, a system of connected trails throughout the Portland area. Forest Park provides a very peaceful experience that will make you forget you are practically downtown Portland.