

# Turning around a failing non-profit is where I learned the power of Vision

*by Ronald K. Wills*

## **“A Proper Vision will Move your Audience to Action and Inspire Your Staff”**

Having completed the Perpetual and Resolution Trust Corporation projects, I was asked to lead the efforts for a Capital Campaign to restore a non-profit back to its former glory. This 145 year old educational institution in Washington, DC was on the verge of closing. It had lost its Vision and purpose for its existence. What I discovered is what Steve Jobs once said “... you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.”

Formerly an all-male military school, it was now co-educational, military optional and a school whose educational standards had dropped to its lowest point in its history. Working with the Stakeholders – president, board, principal and other key individuals – we searched for our purpose. As a consensus began to form, a Vision plan was assembled.

Throughout the first successful Capital Campaign in two generations, we exploded through our first goal of raising \$3 Million, then \$5 Million, \$7.5 Million and finally closing out the Campaign with \$13.5 Million raised. This provided capital to begin the rebuilding of the campus with a Science & Technology Center, Arts Center, Expanded Sports Arena and artificial turf fields.

Throughout the process, the Vision plan we put together kept our Alumni involved, attracted new students and focused our

school leadership when they began to falter during the rebuilding process.

This brings me to the second Life Lesson learned:

*"You can do Amazing things with Little or No Money."*

This could be one of my most valuable Life Lessons learned. Coming from the for-profit world, everything costs money. Any change is calculated in cost, time cost, labor cost, etc. The problem is solved in most non-profits, they simply do not have enough money to accomplish what they want to do!

To accomplish our Vision plan, we had to be creative. Using technology, we were able to communicate with our key constituencies: alumni, potential students and parents, feeder school administrators and staff. We drove involvement and that involvement led to an amazingly successful capital raise for the school.

And within a two year span, we had educated the alumni where they were ready for our ask, and ask we did. Our Campaign netted over four times the original Campaign projections collecting \$13.5 million!