

Duro Electric and The Action Center: Forging Pathways to Self-Sufficiency

The Action Center is a crucial non-profit organization that annually serves 30,000 people in Jefferson County, Colorado, and many who are homeless throughout the Denver Metro area. The Center provides for the acute needs of its clients, such as food, clothing, household items, healthcare clinic, and housing assistance, with a mission to help them reach self-sufficiency. They also serve the community with an annual Thanksgiving Food Give-away, Santa Toy Shop, and School Supply Distribution.

Founded in 1968, The Action Center came into being during the civil rights movement, the “War on Poverty” and the activism surrounding the Vietnam War. By 1991, The Center serviced 30 households daily. When need overran space, they graduated to the old Lakewood Post Office building, and by 1999 were serving 60 households a day.

Over 15 years ago, Duro Electric began a relationship in support of The Action Center. It all started in 1999 when Tim Van Stelle, Duro’s President, attended a fundraising breakfast. The Center had begun a campaign to double its square footage to meet sharply rising needs, and it wasn’t difficult for Tim to see the value of their contribution to the community. Duro went on to donate all electrical services to the 2002 expansion allowing The Action Center to serve 70-80 households daily from the newly expanded facility.

Although the expansion doubled their operating space, it was not long before The Center outgrew its new capacity. Executive Director, Mag Strittmatter, recalls “The recession was driving need, and we found ourselves serving 300 households a day...from food and clothing to household goods. It was mayhem. We wanted to do more than meet acute needs. We wanted to help people get on the road to self-sufficiency.” That would take more planning, more thought, and more space.

Therefore, in 2009, after the agency sacrificed its last closet for an office, it began a campaign to raise money for another expansion. By 2011 the center was able to purchase two outdated 1970’s office buildings adjacent to the original building, which were neither ADA-compliant nor

energy-efficient. “The buildings would have to be redesigned completely. We knew this had to be done very thoughtfully with a clear plan in place and every square inch of space utilized efficiently,” explained Strittmatter. “Concurrently, we were rethinking the entire depth and breadth of The Action Center’s programming. We needed to go well beyond immediate needs and lean into self-sufficiency.”

The Action Center reached out to Duro Electric and Pinkard Construction to begin planning for the new renovations. A value engineering coordination committee was formed which included Duro Electric as one of the prime participants. Duro was excited to once again participate and donate their resources to the new project. The committee met with the Action Center staff monthly over a three year period to develop a solid plan that would allow them to reach its goals.

Early in the construction process, it became apparent that the budget would not meet the needs of The Center. Duro assessed their initial proposal along with the long-term operation/maintenance costs to the facility and found another way to help. They leaned on their exceptional relationships with their lighting vendors and pushed them to provide a more innovative and cost-saving lighting package. This resulted in the installation of premium LED lighting that The Center would not have been able to afford otherwise. These cutting edge, high-quality lights, will net them long-term operational savings for up to 30 years.

As construction began, Duro discovered an unforeseen electrical safety problem which had the potential to delay the entire project. Due to design changes during the renovation process, the old electrical transformer serving the buildings would need to be relocated. Upon further investigation, Duro discovered that the overhead lines servicing the buildings, including both Comcast and CenturyLink, would create an operation/maintenance hazard due to their proximity to the buildings. The best course of action would be to have all the service lines feeding the buildings buried, which would require a major coordination effort - Duro volunteered their time to make this happen.

According to Pinkard project manager Hector Moreno, the extended time involved with scheduling the removal of the overhead power and phone lines took the project into the critical

path. “Coordination with Xcel, Comcast, and CenturyLink could have added months on to the schedule. It had to be completed before we could start digging. If not for Tim’s unwavering dedication to the Action Center, it wouldn’t have happened. He pushed Xcel to free up crews that were otherwise unavailable and get the whole thing done in 8 to 10 weeks.” Because the upgrade would have been a budget breaker, Tim spent a substantial amount of time negotiating all three utilities to defray their costs. The result was a no-cost upgrade which saved The Center over \$40,000 in utility relocation fees.

Labor became another issue for completing the project. While the design process began in a slow economy when plenty of manpower was available, by the time construction began, the economy was in full swing and manpower was at a premium. Since Duro was donating much of their labor costs for the project, allocating resources became challenging. Duro was committed to meet all deadlines, and asked its crews to work off hours and put in extra time in order to complete the project on time.

Public safety was an additional concern as the utility lines were relocated and construction progressed. Duro and Pinkard Construction took extra precautions to protect the people who needed access to the donation center and vehicles delivering product and making food recovery runs. With over 3,200 Duro man-hours on this active jobsite, which remained partially open throughout construction, it’s worthy to note that there were zero accidents reported throughout the completion of the project.

In April 2015 The Action Center opened their new doors to the community. Today, 130 households are served daily for acute needs, with a focus on gaining self-sufficiency. In the previous year, The Center took in \$10 million in distributable in-kind items, such as clothing and household goods, which needed to be managed. With the efficient use of the additional space offered by the new building, they have been able to organize and process this merchandise more efficiently.

Highlighting the newly renovated space is a self-select grocery where clients can choose from a colorful array of fresh produce. Trucks and vans donated by Duro are used to rescue 150,000 lbs.

of fresh, high quality food each month from Trader Joes, Whole Foods, and Sprouts markets - food that would otherwise have been discarded. Upstairs in the main building, the reception area is now better designed to direct clients to the specific area they need. This floor serves as a one-stop shop for mental and physical health services, job training, and education, with office space available for other agencies to co-locate, making the client's recovery easier. Strittmatter says, "We collaborate with other agencies to offer services right up here in the new building. Now we can be responsive, rather than reactive. We are able to affect change in people's lives with their full-on participation."

Duro contributed one of the largest subcontractor donations in labor and material for this project. Yet, Tim VanStelle is not focused on the dollar amounts - "It's about the impact this organization makes to our community, and the culture we've created around that sense of service." Duro's ongoing support, outside of this construction work, includes:

Where Action Matters Breakfast Fundraiser Sponsor

This breakfast raises funds that The Center uses to provide essential stabilizing services to those in need. Duro continues its annual support of this program by underwriting the event and introducing new associates to the needs of The Center. Duro's efforts have resulted in many new supporters that may not have known of The Action Centers existence or mission otherwise.

Matching Employee Donations

Every year during the holiday season, Duro employees are encouraged to donate to The Action Center. The company matches all gifts dollar-for-dollar to help make the impact even greater.

Vehicle Donations

Historically, Duro has donated several vans and trucks to The Action Center for the organization's needs.

Ongoing Maintenance

Duro continues to provide ongoing electrical building maintenance to The Center at no cost to them.

Duro's consistent contributions to the Action Center since 1999, culminating with this year's construction, demonstrate the commitment of the management and employees of the company. "It's impossible to quantify the support Duro Electric has given us and our community members over the past 15 years," says Strittmatter. From vehicle donations, to 12 years as sponsor of our annual fundraiser breakfast, and then spreading the word about us to other community members who in turn forge strong supportive bonds with us. We can't thank them enough."

Duro Electric's contribution allowed for a dream to become reality for The Action Center and the hundreds of people who have and will soon become fully contributing members of its community.











