Give Safely: Tips On Ensuring Donations Help the Cause

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People begin thinking more about charities during the holiday season.
So do scammers. They’re not giving, though. They are figuring out ways to cheat people out of their money under the guise of a charitable cause.
Fake charities don’t just pop up during the holidays, but they can be harder to spot when so many people are looking for ways to give. Residents also should be aware that other charities, while not breaking any laws, end up keeping most of the money they receive.
Residents aren’t defenseless though, and there are ways to find out how much donated money goes to a cause and how much goes to administrative costs. For example, residents...

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can go to the consumer section of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services website at freshfromflorida.com to check on the credibility of a charity before parting with their cash.
Before residents start finalizing their list of where to donate, Steve Renico, Seniors vs. Crime Region IV director and Village of Hadley resident, has a few tips to help figure out who’s naughty and who’s nice.

What’s the number one thing that worries you when it comes to donating around the holidays?

That you’re going to run across someone whose intentions aren’t as charitable as yours are. I get a little tight-fisted around this time. I don’t answer the phone. I know charities can call, I understand that — I just say I make my donation to other people. I donate to whom I wish to donate to, and that’s a private decision. If you want to make donations for Toys for Tots, if you want to do food banks, there are just so many needy organizations out there.

They have a need and they have a need, and if you want to participate, you know they’re legitimate. That should be your decision and not someone else’s. Like everything else, I think if someone’s going to part with their money they need to be 100 percent sure where that money’s going to go.

What are some worst-case scenarios you’ve seen with bad charities?

There are some charities that, when they solicit, the solicitors end up with most of the money. There are some charities where, for every dollar you donate, 15 cents goes to the charity and the solicitor pockets the rest. That’s unconscionable. If you have the intention to donate to some place that’s worth of your donation, why would you spend 15 cents out of every dollar instead of a dollar out of every dollar? It frustrates me when these kinds of folks use these kinds of things to line their pockets.

With the number of tragedies in 2017, should people be on the lookout for fake fundraising campaigns for Hurricane Irma relief or money for victims of recent mass shootings?

I think so. You’re going to find a lot of attempts of those types of fundraising on social media, Facebook, GoFundMe pages and so on. I think there are national organizations that deal very well with those situations from a charitable standpoint, and I think you would be better served by those organizations than some that may tug at your heartstrings but may only be a scam. I tend to believe that, sometimes, the history of a charity is the best predictor of the future. If you’ve dealt with some of the long-standing charities that have a well-standing reputation, you’re well-served keeping with those folks.

What are some indicators of a good reputation?

I think longevity has a lot to do with it. If the organization is not doing a legitimate job of providing funds to the charity, the public will find out about that soon enough. But I think an indicator would be how much they’re giving to the charity and how much they keep for themselves. Some national organizations have administrative costs, and I understand that, but some are higher than others and you have to wonder why.

A charity is a charity and I think that most people labor under the misconception that I gave a dollar, a dollar goes to charity.
I would find a charity that addresses the cause you want addressed and provides the highest amount to the charity and the lowest administrative cost. If you have some money you want to give away, you should get the best bang for your buck.