

Volunteers: Torrance's Chad Mayer puts a 'strong heart' to work

By Ashley Jakubczyk

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Chad Mayer always wanted to live a purposeful life.

"I wanted to be passionate about what I wanted to do professionally," says the Torrance resident. "I've always had a strong heart to serve. If you look at my strengths as an individual and at the strengths of ShareFest, they go hand in hand."

ShareFest Community Development Inc., which Mayer co-founded, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing out the best in South Bay and Harbor Area communities. The organization thrives on creative collaboration for positive change.

The concept for ShareFest originated while Mayer, now the group's executive director, held a position as pastor at a local church. Mayer's senior pastor attended a conference in Little Rock, Ark., and brought back the idea that grew into ShareFest.

"I watched a video about it, and immediately loved the concept of different churches and organizations working together to help the community," Mayer says.

To give ShareFest a kick-start, Mayer asked the city of Redondo Beach for a project that would have a large impact on the city.

"They introduced us to the Historical Society, that had been trying to refurbish the historic Morrell House," he recalls.

The project spanned approximately two years, with more than 600 volunteers working each Saturday to complete it. Today, the city uses the house for weddings, parties, and other events held by nonprofit organizations.

"In that

effort we partnered with a local contractor," Mayer says.

When the contractor was approached by ABC to lead on a project for "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," ShareFest was asked to become a partner on the project.

"We obviously said yes, and that really helped us to launch," Mayer said. "It brought us past just an annual one-day event and turned us into an actual organization."

And ShareFest continued to grow.

The Summer Youth Development Academy was created when there was a need for summer programming for at-risk youths. Through the academy, students from a continuation school attend a four-week program hosted at California State University, Dominguez Hills each summer.

"Hosting it at CSUDH is huge because a lot of the

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kids come from surrounding schools, which makes it community oriented," he says. "Students become familiar with a local university campus at a young age, which gives them motivation to do well and be able to go to college.

"There is an element of fun, but also an element of academics, which helps them to retain information that they learned during the school year. It helps us to give back to the next generation, providing these kids with what they need to be successful."

In 2009, in partnership with the Los Angeles mayor's office, ShareFest helped to relocate a module unit from the LAPD and create a community center, which was given to the Boys & Girls Clubs.

ShareFest has also partnered with the communities of Wilmington and San Pedro.

"We have found that we are successful in Wilmington after working with a local community activist who is very passionate about her cause," Mayer says. "She helped us to partner with the chamber of commerce, which helped further our involvement in the community."

Mayer takes great pride in how ShareFest has grown.

"We started a nonprofit during the worst economic time in our nation, and that helped us to become really efficient, take donations, and multiply," he says. "We are an efficient organization that does a lot with only a little."

ShareFest has so far worked with more than 35,000 volunteers, and has completed more than \$6.5 million of work for local communities and schools. In the past year, more than 5,000 volunteers participated in the organization's Annual Workday.

"We actually only have three paid employees," Mayer says. "We ask for volunteers on our

Annual Workday, but there are people who want to volunteer on an ongoing basis. A lot of times people want to volunteer, they just don't know how to start. We're able to help them with fulfilling that desire.

"I never saw myself doing this, but I'm blessed with people pouring into my life and giving me the resources to be successful, and that compels me to continue to serve others."

Ashley Jakubczyk is a freelance writer.



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