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Big donation helping fund inebriate program in Fairbanks

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FAIRBANKS — Christmas came early this year for the Community Service Patrol, a program which deals with public inebriates in the downtown core area. The program was in danger of losing \$50,000 in grant money from the city because it could not meet a required \$140,000 cash match, but a surprise \$20,000 donation has brightened the outlook considerably.

A donor, who does not wish to be acknowledged publicly, walked into the offices of the Downtown Association of Fairbanks Monday afternoon “looking to write a check” according to David van den Berg, executive director of the the organization which runs the CSP.

The donation was prompted by a News-Miner article Sunday about the program’s funding problems. The article mistakenly overstated the amount that the CSP was short. Even after being informed of the error, the donor was undeterred, van den Berg said.

“After I explained, (the donor) said ‘Well how much do you need? I came in here prepared to do \$20,000,’” van den Berg said.

Van den Berg said that if the program receives pending donation requests they will exceed the amount needed for the match. That money would be carried over and be used towards meeting the 2012 grant match.

The CSP picks up inebriates in the downtown core area and transports them to an appropriate location, based upon their level of intoxication. This service benefits the police force because they spend less time dealing with inebriates and more time responding to other public safety concerns, said van den Berg.

The CSP used to fund itself with gaming revenue that it received from Downtown Bingo, which also funded the Fairbanks Shakespeare Theatre and Festival Fairbanks. That funding source has dried up because of two factors — the broad downturn in the economy and the opening of a third bingo parlor in town, van den Berg said. Because of this loss of revenue, the CSP was forced to approach the city for funding, and the program was given \$50,000 in 2010. The council then passed an ordinance introduced by Councilwoman Vivian Stiver, establishing the \$50,000 grant until 2014 and requiring the \$140,000 cash match.

Fairbanks City Clerk Janey Hovenden said that the council could still vote against funding the CSP grant but that it’s unlikely that they would do so unless the city was facing a budget shortfall. The city is currently debt free and has a budget surplus, a situation that Mayor Jerry Cleworth expects to last for the next several years.

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