

Creating the Samaritan House Logo

The Samaritan House quest for a logo started with a May 2009 email titled 'Charity requesting a graphic design help for a NEW logo.'

Samaritan House has been operating in Charlotte for almost 5 years and people have mistaken it for a variety of other Charlotte charities. Samaritan House is not a shelter or a medical facility, but it does take in homeless guests who have been released from a hospital stay. Samaritan House is not a soup kitchen, but it does serve 3 meals a day to its guest while they heal. Samaritan House does not distribute shoebox packages, but does provide clothing and toiletries to the guests who usually arrive with only hurt and a name.

In April, 2009, the Samaritan House Board of Directors decided if Samaritan House had a logo, then maybe our organization could break out with its own identity and the confusion would stop. We always thought our mission as a not-for-profit recuperative care place for people who are homeless and in need of a short term care following a hospital or emergency room stay, might be unique enough. But we noted that in the world of well-meaning charities competing for donors, we needed a branding that was as unique as our mission.

So how do we go about 'getting a logo,' and how are we going to afford the design? A number of the Board members had friends, or friends of friends, who offered a few designs. These well-meaning attempts lacked a polish that would grab and hold someone's attention. The Board wanted something that would make the viewer stop and want to inquire about Samaritan House; something, that when they saw the logo the next time, with or without the Samaritan House name, they would remember our mission of sheltering those who need physical, and sometimes mental, healing.

Would there be a college class or business that would help us on a budget of sincerity and belief in our cause? We decided to put our request out there and see who would respond.

Our first attempt would be to contact two names plucked from the CPCC website. Emails were blindly sent to Kenn Compton, the Chairperson of CPCC Advertising + Graphic Design, department, and Deanna Campbell, a CPCC teacher in charge of the Advertising Copywriting class.

In less than 4 hours, Deanna answered stating that the class was on summer break, but maybe they could help in the fall semester. Deanna's email closed with the line, "creative people are positive people." It was a short, direct and exciting response.

Prior to the start of the Fall Semester, I met with Kenn and Deanna to 'pitch' the Samaritan House needs, with the underlying desire: bring more attention to Samaritan House and help it stand-out from the other charities in the Charlotte community. As I spoke, both professors nodded, asked lots of questions and took notes. I felt like I was on a job interview; will they like what I say? Will they understand our mission and need? Once I stopped talking they said they would get back with me. Hmm... was the message, don't call us, we'll call you?

Within a few weeks, Deanna called me with exciting news; Kenn had given the go-ahead for the CPCC classes to help Samaritan House with a logo identity. The next step in the process was to conduct a planning session.

Deanna scheduled a meeting to include Dan Clohan, who teaches Graphic Design II at CPCC, Ruth Woodend, Co-founder of Samaritan House, Brad Goforth, Samaritan House Executive Director and me. Deanna and Dan had many ideas to present. They spoke about the logo possibilities, but also proposed an awareness campaign to bring immediate attention to Samaritan House. The awareness installation, to take place at Trade and Tryon Streets, was an unexpected bonus and sounded incredible, and Ruth, Brad and I were drawn more and more into this wonderfully outrageous project proposal.

Before Dan's Graphic Design II class began working on the logo proposals, the students asked for a tour of the Samaritan House facility and for background on Samaritan House. Brad, Ruth and Freda Schlaman, Co-founder of Samaritan House, presented an oral history of the organization and we all spoke of the current challenges for Samaritan House to distance ourselves from local and national charities. After a tour of the house, a few of the Samaritan House guests asked to address the students. Donald spoke about the needed heart medications that he could not afford, but that Samaritan House paid for; Tonya spoke of the room and meals at Samaritan House, and how after healing from a beating, she would join family in another state. The guests brought a new light to what the logo needed to represent. The Board wanted to align the new logo to match our mission, but guests helped us, and the students, to realize the new logo needed to represent their feelings of what Samaritan House means to them; a welcome in a time of trouble or tragedy, a place of comfort where mending is physical and mental, where they are shown respect and where no one is judged, and a new starting point from where they can re-access and move forward for a better tomorrow. The students, broken into teams, would now have 5 weeks to create the logo and presentation.

As the Graphics Design class withdrew into their designs, Deanna's Advertising Copywriting class was preparing for Uptown awareness campaign. For the first 3-workdays of November 2009, the students constructed a 'homeless camp' on the Bank of America Plaza. The camp was comprised of a ripped tent, cardboard floors, a camp stove and a hospital gurney. The gurney helped explain the signs carried by the students that read, 'the streets are no place for hospital beds.' The gurney and signs helped to explain the mission of Samaritan House. From 10:00am to 2:00pm, the students, Deanna and the Samaritan House Board members, distributed over a 1,000 Samaritan House brochures. Bankers took time from their blackberrys to ask questions, visitors took pictures of the homeless camp with the copper disk in the background and the team addressed all inquires from the curious who wanted to know what was happening at Trade & Tryon.

The Charlotte Observer advertised the installation, and News14 created a story about Samaritan House. Shawn Flynn began with an interview of the students and filmed their interaction with the public, but then asked to see Samaritan House for himself. His telecast included a tour of Samaritan House and interviews with our

Executive Director, Brad Goforth, and with Frank, a Samaritan House guest recovering from cancer surgery. The Uptown installation was a success and Samaritan House was in the news.

In the week following the successful awareness campaign, the students in Dan's course were ready to present their logo designs to the Samaritan House Board members. All members met the students at the Harper Campus at a very early hour. Four student teams took 30 minutes each to present their design. In each presentation, the teams used storyboards to display their designs to fit billboards, letterhead, business cards, etc. To explain their design, each group told us what they had learned about Samaritan House from their visit to the house and from our websites (Internet and Facebook). The designs were very different from each other, and helped the Board members to 'see' Samaritan House through a younger, and different, set of eyes. The Board left CPCC with a tough decision... we would have until Thanksgiving to make a decision.

Four designs, multiple formats, various colors, a three-week timeline and a dozen Board member opinions... all these facts mashed together to produce a new, public signature for Samaritan House. The result would need to be as unique as Samaritan House itself. The Board exchanged thoughts in emails and finally met to discuss the storyboards. The final decision for a logo was more complicated than anticipated, and two hours later, a selection was made, and Samaritan House had a new visual identity.

Ruth summed up the comments of the Board, "we were thrilled by the work of all the students; it was a difficult choice, and we sincerely thank all the students for their hard work." The students who worked on the new design included, Daniel Shaver, Andrea Gregory, Chivy Khilm-Phoung, Cynthia Ross and Tom Sippola. After completing the program Gregory and Khilm-Phoung plan to design on a freelance basis, Shaver aspires to become an art director and Sippola intends to work in the communications department at a non-profit organization. Ross' goal is to either join a design team or pursue a freelance career.