

CRE Consulting Corps: *Making a Difference in Madison*

The consulting team members were quite honest when looking at our real estate assets and it was evident that they have been trained to look at maximizing value. At the same time, they were quick to understand that maximizing monetary value may not be exactly what the sisters want to do to live out their mission. The team was able to get creative about looking at how to maximize the monetary value of the land while balancing that with the sisters' mission value of the land.

—Mike Sweitzer-Beckman, Director of Development
Holy Wisdom Monastery



THE CLIENT: Holy Wisdom Monastery is owned by and also the home of The Benedictine Women of Madison, a small ecumenical monastic community of single Christian women. The religious order owns a total of 200 acres of land improved with a Monastery building awarded Platinum LEED certification along with several other buildings.

The property is located in one of the most desirable areas of the Madison metropolitan area and has long been sought after by local developers. The Benedictines and their staff are environmentally conscious with a significant focus on preservation and restoration of the prairie that comprises a significant portion of the site.

THE CHALLENGE: Cash flow from operations of the Monastery is not sufficient to pay debt service, operating expenses and living expenses for the religious order. Although the organization has a sizable endowment, it is not sufficient to pay off the organization's debt and meet its short- and long-term obligations. The organization sought the assistance of the CRE Consulting Corps to analyze current management and investment practices; identify areas where costs can be reduced and where the organization can source additional revenue; and develop a long term strategic plan that utilizes the properties to support the financial needs of



the organization in a manner consistent with the land use ethic expressed in the organization's mission statement.

THE ASSESSMENT: Over a five-day period, the CRE Consulting Corps team members immersed themselves into the daily rhythm of life at the monastery. To fulfill their assignment, they gathered market data, reviewed trends and forecasts, and interviewed a number of stakeholders. Interviewees included leaders, staff and members of the Holy Wisdom Monastery community, local government officials, area real estate professionals, and personnel from an adjacent development. They examined the financial realities and projections of the

community's operations, fund-raising capacity and investment potential. In addition, they researched those same areas of focus for similar organizations.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS: As is often the case with a Consulting Corps engagement, the recommendations went far beyond the original scope of the assignment. ***The report detailed strategic direction in four major areas: real estate holdings, governance, operations and fund-raising.*** The over-arching recommendations can be summarized as follows: retain all land pending development of a strategic master land use plan; repay mortgage debt with proceeds from investment asset liquidation (and not sale of land); restructure the organization and operations to reflect a more corporate model; ramp up fund-raising with a clear, consistent and compelling message; and incorporate operational recommendations to increase the use and occupancy of existing facilities.



The team proposed a tagline that resonates in all four areas: ***The Preservation of the Land is in the Mission . . . the Preservation of the Mission is in the Land.***

THE TEAM: Team members included: **Casey R. Kemper, CRE**, New York, NY; **Brian J. Curry, CRE**, San Diego, CA; **Hugh F. Kelly, Ph.D., CRE**, Brooklyn, NY; **John J. Leary, CRE**, New Haven, CT; and **William P.J. McCarthy, CRE**, Burnaby, B.C., Canada. Casey Kemper served as team leader and **Thomas M. Justin, CRE**, represented the Consulting Corps Steering Committee in procuring the engagement. The project was funded in part by The CRE Foundation and sponsored by **Frederick J. Campbell, CRE**, Madison, WI.



This team was special. They represented a combination of five individuals with very high levels of expertise who also shared a common bond of spiritual awareness and respect of the client's mission. They hit the ground running, came well versed on the background materials, got up to speed quickly on new information gathered from the interviews, sought out additional information on their own, and seemed to glide effortlessly into organized and well thought out conclusions and recommendations.

—Frederick J. Campbell, CRE
The Cascade Group, LLC
Madison, Wisconsin

Do you volunteer for or know of an organization in your backyard whose real estate problems could benefit from the undisputed expertise of the CRE Consulting Corps? A simple **phone call** (312-329-8431) or **email** (shaack@cre.org) from you could set the wheels in motion to solve a problem in **your** community.