

Wells Fargo gives Communities In Schools \$25,000

by David Perlmutter, *The Charlotte Observer*
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There are 106 students at the Performance Learning Center high school on North Graham Street. All had dropped out of school, or were on their way out the door.

The center, a partnership between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the nonprofit Communities In Schools, provides an alternative for students who lost their way in traditional schools.

The classes are small. Teachers nurture relationships. As CIS Executive Director Bill Anderson said, "Kids can't be wallflowers here."

That's why on Wednesday, the famed horse-drawn Wells Fargo stagecoach (actually there are 26 around the country) pulled up to the learning center to the cheers of students wearing straw cowboy hats.



Performance Learning Center students Aysha Harrington (right) and Christa Phillips tip their hats to Wachovia official Laura Schulte and others as they travel up North Graham Street by stagecoach Wednesday.

The stagecoach had been parked at Wachovia Plaza on South Tryon, where Wachovia, now owned by Wells Fargo, kicked off its community support and United Way campaign with another vote of confidence for Jane McIntyre, the new president of United Way of Central Carolinas.

After McIntyre spoke to a crowd of bank employees, the dog (a Boxer named Jack sat on top of the coach) and pony (four horses pulled it) show rolled out on Tryon and pushed north, then west to North Graham. Forty-five minutes later, it rolled into the Learning Center parking lot.

It was not carrying a steamer chest of gold, but it did have a check for \$25,000 that the bank turned over to Communities in Schools. In the afternoon, the bank gave Junior Achievement another check for \$25,000.

For CIS, the donation will come in handy after losing 23.5 percent of its United Way funding. The nonprofit has doubled in size in two years from site coordinators in 25 CMS schools to 47.

"The fact that Wells Fargo, Wachovia, First Union have long been supporters of CIS, we're extremely appreciative of them recognizing the work we do," Anderson said. "It reiterates the importance of proving that outcomes of nonprofits make a difference."

The bank's donations were symbolic on many levels. For months, many in banktown have worried about the impact the recession would have on banks and their long history of philanthropy in Charlotte.

But Laura Schulte, president of East Coast banking for the merged bank, made it clear that keeping the Charlotte region strong is good for business.

"We can't be successful as a company unless the community that we do business in – and that our employees and customers live in – is successful," Schulte said.

She said the bank supports United Way, but this year is instituting an “open giving” plan that would allow employees to give to the charity of their choice, with some matching fund opportunities.

“People today want more choices ... and support what they feel is important,” Schulte said. “But we do believe that the United Way concept is important to this community.”