



WMU President Diether Haenicke

Office of the President

7-1-2009

Flags, birds, angels: Address labels reflect a history of charitable giving

Diether Haenicke
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/haenicke>



Part of the Higher Education Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Haenicke, Diether, "Flags, birds, angels: Address labels reflect a history of charitable giving" (2009). *WMU President Diether Haenicke*. 24.

<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/haenicke/24>

This Newspaper Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President Diether Haenicke by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.





Flags, birds, angels: Address labels reflect a history of charitable giving

By Diether Haenicke
July 01, 2009

The other day I cleaned out my desk and stumbled upon thousands of address labels. They had accumulated over the years and reflect, to a large degree, my charitable giving.

It is a fact of life: Once you make a contribution to a worthwhile cause, the charities put you on their list of potential repeat donors. This then triggers occasional little gifts such as notepads, calendars, stickers, refrigerator magnets, and most certainly address labels. In my case, my charitable giving has provided me with a lifetime supply of them.

But do I and can I use them? Every time a new batch arrives I ask myself this question. Occasionally the labels carry wrong information. My house number or the zip code are incorrect. I am always tempted to use these for future charitable contributions that are meant to be one-time. Will the wrong information on my return address prevent follow-up solicitations? Then I realize that the charity used this same wrong address on the envelope in which the labels arrived and the clever people at the post office -- bless their hearts -- do find me even if two digits are mixed up. Given this fact, I immediately throw out the labels with wrong house numbers.

Ditto for those that change my name in curious ways. My name is hard to spell, and so I have labels that spell my last name like a famous beer and my first name as if I were on a permanent diet. Other labels, obviously prepared by multi-culturally ignorant fund raisers, make me Ms. Diether Haenicke. I don't use those either because I don't want to startle my friends with the suspicion that a sex change has taken place.

A third point has to do with both loyalty and taste. Loyalty first. The Kalamazoo Valley Community College Foundation sent me a rather attractive label with their logo on it. I

have similar labels from the University of Michigan, the University of Notre Dame, Ohio State University and Western Michigan University. I only use the latter for the simple reason that I love Western and want no one to think that my solid loyalty to WMU is changing.

When it comes to taste, the decision is more difficult. The American Diabetes Association adorns my labels with high-heeled pumps, purses and other female fashion paraphernalia. Nicely done, but definitely not me. Out they go. The March of Dimes people delight me with labels showing chirping little yellow birds. One might think that I contributed to the Audubon Society. The American Cancer Society occasionally selects seasonal motifs. I have their labels decorated with colorful maple leaves, pumpkins and scarecrows, which are useful around Halloween. I use them when I pay bills to plumbers, bankers or doctors who won't mind the playful images.

When my son concluded his graduate studies at Notre Dame, I felt I owed the school. He had been on a full scholarship, had received excellent schooling, and had been very happy there. So I sent a check, which in Educationese means "I love you." It seems that Notre Dame immediately gives the names of their donors to any other Catholic charity in the world, because I am now flooded with labels from Catholic orphanages in Indonesia to Indian reservation missions in the Dakotas. I have labels with glorious pictures of angels making music, angels praying and angels spreading cheer. I save those for correspondence with a few priest-friends and for the unlikely possibility that I might one day write to my admired fellow countryman in the Vatican.

I confess to somewhat emotional ties when it comes to address labels mailed by American veterans' associations. American veterans are my heroes. They fed me, they protected me, they saved my chance for a good life. Childhood memories, yes. Sentimental, yes. But nevertheless very strong. I send them my checks and they send me their labels with flying flags, eagles, troops, planes and fireworks on them. I welcome them and I use them all.

But ever so often, when yet another batch of address labels arrives, I wish fund-raisers would come up with a completely new idea and send me something that I really, really need.

*This column was first published Aug. 12, 2008 in the Kalamazoo Gazette
mlive.com/kalamazoo*