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HENNES PAYNTER CAPTURES TOP AWARD FOR METROHEALTH CRISIS CONSULTING WORK

CLEVELAND, December 22, 2010 – For the second year in a row, Hennes Paynter Communications has received top recognition from the Greater Cleveland Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America for its crisis consulting work on behalf of clients in the region. On December 3, the firm received a Gold “Rocks” award for the work it completed earlier this year to help The MetroHealth System overcome a corruption scandal that resulted when the organization’s vice president of construction and his assistant were implicated in a bribery and kick-back scheme – a finding that came just as the system faced the challenging prospect of voter approval for an upcoming Health & Human Services levy.

When MetroHealth uncovered the likely criminal activity in 2008, it hired Hennes Paynter to work with the MetroHealth communications team on a strategy that would effectively tell MetroHealth’s side of the story and preserve public confidence in the organization. Over the course of two years, the agency helped staff members conduct an ongoing program of proactive communications to employees, the media and Cuyahoga County residents that focused on the actions MetroHealth took to strengthen its policies for awarding contracts and to reinforce its code of ethics among all employees. The program also included proactive communications explaining the steps MetroHealth took to reduce deficits and realign the system’s budget – information that was critical to assuring voters MetroHealth is a responsible steward of the public’s tax dollars.

Over the course of the program, stories about MetroHealth’s role in the growing Cuyahoga County corruption scandal accurately portrayed the institution’s response and voluntary efforts to protect the public’s interest in their hospital system. On May 4, 2010, the County’s Health and Human Services levy passed overwhelmingly (66% - 34%).

“Hennes Paynter was invaluable in helping us formulate, and then carry out, a program that reinforced and, in some cases, restored the public’s confidence in the MetroHealth System,” said Eileen Korey, vice president, communications. “Their perspective and experience were critical in those first days when we realized the enormous potential impact that this activity might have on our ability to continue our mission to serve Cuyahoga County’s healthcare needs.”

After several years of deficits, MetroHealth finished 2009 in the black, despite one of the most challenging economies ever to face Northeast Ohio.

“So often, an organization under attack reacts by going deep under cover,” said Barbara Paynter, partner of Hennes Paynter, “but in our experience, that response only makes the situation worse. Eventually, you have to face the court of public opinion and tell your side of the story. MetroHealth was very proactive in its communications. By getting out front of this story, MetroHealth’s leadership made it clear that they were doing the right thing to resolve a difficult situation. We were privileged to help them do that.”

In 2009, Hennes Paynter won the coveted “Best of Show” award from the Public Relations Society of America – Greater Cleveland Chapter for its work with another agency on the national peanut butter recall.

Hennes Paynter Communications, based in Cleveland, is one of the few firms in the U.S. focused exclusively on crisis communications and media training. Serving corporations, government agencies, nonprofits and individuals who are “on trial” in the court of public opinion, Hennes Paynter Communications also offers litigation communication support, crisis communication plans and drills, and presentation training to clients. For more information, please go to www.crisiscommunications.com.

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