

A graphic at the top of the page shows several stylized hands of different colors (white, orange, and brown) raised against a dark wood-grain background. The hands are of varying heights and are positioned behind the main title text.

COMPANIES THAT GIVE BACK

BY BARBI WALKER

Corporate community involvement has become so important that it is increasingly woven into the culture of many companies. In fact, hundreds of businesses are incorporating community and charitable work, or corporate social responsibility (CSR), into their mission statements and business strategies.

Corporate social responsibility and corporate success were seen as compatible in an article in the *Harvard Business Review* back in 2006. The authors, Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, wrote, "When looked at strategically, corporate social responsibility can become a source of tremendous social progress, as the business applies its considerable resources, expertise and insights to activities that benefit society."

Five years later, we are seeing how companies took this advice and applied the knowledge. Multiple communities, states and organizations are reaping the benefits of increased corporate involvement. Large and small companies nationwide are giving back to global and local communities, which can create customer loyalty for the informed consumer.

People want to know that the companies they choose are having a positive impact on customers, the community and their employees; and that the company's values and causes are meaningful and align with theirs, and whether the company is trustworthy and admirable, according to authors of "Consumed, Rethinking Business in the Era of Mindful Spending."

Starbucks, Microsoft and Ben & Jerry's are just a few of the multinational conglomerates that give back and have gained customer loyalty through philanthropic work and CSR.

"Today, brands matter a lot," said Ann O'Reilly, one of the authors of "Good For Business: The Rise of the Conscious Corporation." The implication is that what companies do matters a great deal to their value; one can only reflect on the Gulf oil spill and its impact on British Petroleum's (BP) brand and value.

On a more positive note, the partnership of Ethos water and Starbucks was formed to provide clean drinking water to children in developing countries, and Microsoft gifts of software, computers and technology advancement are well known and unquestionably important. Equally so are the lesser-known programs by smaller, local companies and organizations.

Liberty Water, a utility company based in Avondale, goes above and beyond in its donation of money, time and resources to the communities it serves.

"Liberty Water created Liberty Days and Liberty Heroes as a way for the employees and company to give back to the communities we serve," said Greg Sorensen, Vice President of Service Delivery. The program has been in place since 2009 and was the result of

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management listening to employees and their view on what kind of company they wanted to work for, Sorensen said.

Liberty Days are days in which Liberty Water employees connect with the community by participating in community activities and events. Employees are given three paid days to volunteer in the community. Liberty Days are also a way that Liberty Water can reach out to the community by hosting events like the Peralta Trail Cleanup in Gold Canyon, or Fire and Safety Day in Rio Rico, Arizona.

Liberty Water believes so much in CSR that they have a program designed to "catch employees doing something good," Sorensen explained. The company's Liberty Heroes program recognizes employees who go above and beyond in helping to uphold the company's values of care, community, family and responsibility.

Manny Archuleta was acknowledged recently as a Liberty Hero. Archuleta, an operations field supervisor from Sierra Vista, took a vacation day to volunteer at the local Veterans of Foreign Wars office to deliver a scooter and build a ramp for a disabled WWII veteran. "He needed a ramp so he could get in and out of his home," Archuleta said. "I took time off so we could pick up the scooter and build the ramp." Archuleta says he sometimes runs errands for the 85-year-old veteran, who also used to be his neighbor.



Liberty Water's Liberty Hero's Winner, Manny Archuleta, (R) is the operations field supervisor in Sierra Vista, Arizona.



Peralta Trail clean up, Liberty Water.

This is the kind of volunteerism and social commitment Liberty Water's programs were designed for by encouraging employee engagement and employee pride.

"It's meant for our employees to give back to the charities or community programs that are important to them," Sorensen

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added. "I think it's fantastic. It's a way for an employer to give back to the community it serves."

According to *The Washington Post*, businesses give back in many ways, such as directing an amount of profits to charities or social causes, setting aside time for employees to have paid time to volunteer, as well as partnering with causes or charities in long-term relationships.

Many companies do all of the above and give to a myriad of causes such as the environment, animal welfare or humanity services. Even smaller local companies are doing both in big ways and winning humanitarian awards for it. In a recent issue of the *Phoenix Business Journal*, Grand Canyon University and McMurry, both local companies, tied for the Business Volunteer Program of the Year award.

Grand Canyon University students, staff and faculty came together to improve surrounding neighborhoods through the Canyon Cares program. "The volunteers of the program do everything from painting over graffiti to collecting toys at Christmas," according to the *Phoenix Business Journal*.

McMurry, a publishing, marketing and public relations firm, has a total of 175 employees. McMurry's Phoenix office hosts the bulk of the company's employees, with 106 employees who have donated millions of dollars to charities and countless hours to the community.

"Everybody here has a big heart," said Katie Haney, McMurry's spokesperson. "Giving to our community is part of our culture."



Each year the company decides which charities to support, and last year employees took 6th-graders from Madison Park Elementary School to Build-A-Bear. There, the students made bears to give to sick children at the Phoenix Children's Hospital.

"The kids hand-delivered the bears and it was so great," Haney said. She added that some of the children included hand-written notes of well wishes to attach to the bears.

Haney said sometimes it's hard to decide which organizations to support, so they try to mix it up. One year McMurry collected blankets to give to a local animal shelter.

With so many companies doing good work, it isn't hard to find one that is doing something great in your own backyard. As committed and concerned citizens, we have the ability to choose companies that do more than sell products and services - but commit to making the communities they serve better places to live. ■

Barbi Walker is a freelance writer and an award-winning journalist. Barbi lives in Phoenix with her husband and young son.

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Green Living AZ asked local corporations how they engage and encourage their employees to give back to our Arizona community.

American Express

American Express' employee volunteer program, Serve2Gether, provides a variety of opportunities for employees to volunteer as an individual, as a team or together with family and friends to make a difference in our community. Employees can sign up for a variety of volunteer opportunities, including Habitat for Humanity®, St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance® and many more. Employees can also post projects online and encourage colleagues to join them at their volunteer opportunities. In addition, employees who log and record their hours on the Serve2Gether site are eligible to receive Serve2Gether grants for their designated nonprofit organizations.



TruWest Credit Union

Encouraging and rewarding volunteerism with employees is a key component of TruWest's efforts to giving back and creating a "culture of caring" for members. Several times a year, TruWest recruits volunteers for the Employee Volunteer Program to visit charitable organizations and events and help make the community a better place. Employees are rewarded with "points" for volunteering that can be redeemed for TruWest logo shirts, paid time off, auto loan discounts or cash.

In the last few years, TruWest has proudly helped several organizations like Habitat for Humanity®, HomeBase Youth Services, Special Olympics Arizona and Junior Achievement®.



REI

REI's core purpose is to inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime of outdoor adventure and stewardship. To support its mission, the company actively builds partnerships with local non-profit organizations that work to preserve natural spaces through various activities, including its grants program and volunteer opportunities.

In 2010, REI granted \$3.7 million to organizations that help people experience, restore and enhance the outdoors through volunteerism, including Arizona Trail Association, Audubon Arizona, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona (VOAZ). The grants are the result of nominations made by employees at local REI stores. REI invites its community to join in caring for these places through volunteer opportunities hosted by REI or its non-profit partners. Event information is available at rei.com/stores.



Desert Schools FCU

At Desert Schools Federal Credit Union employees are engaged in volunteerism, community education and corporate financial contributions for Arizona charitable programs. Desert Schools employees donate time to programs such as St. Vincent de Paul, St. Mary's Food Bank and Habitat for Humanity®. They are leaders in providing generous financial contributions to community enhancement programs like the Children's Miracle Network and Phoenix Children's Hospital. Additionally, Desert Schools is a valued educational resource, providing free seminars and classes throughout the state on such financial topics as estate planning, the importance of wills and trusts, Medicare enrollment and program information and many more.

"The Valley has been our home for over 70 years, and giving back to the community is one of Desert Schools' core values," said Susan Frank, CEO of Desert Schools. "Now more than ever, it's important to give financially, give our time, and as a financial institution, to provide financial education. In 2010, Desert Schools gave over \$500,000 in donations, over 2,000 volunteer hours, and taught over 200 financial education classes."

