



Corporate giving: how businesses are giving back to their communities

BY OLIVIA RUTT

WELLINGTON COUNTY - There is an old idea that businesses exist solely to make money.

Yet many businesses in Wellington County are working against that concept and are giving back to the community.

Giving back as a business can be beneficial in many ways, such as boosting employee morale and improving community relations. It can also be a benefit to the company during tax time. Above all, it supports charitable organizations that rely on donations to operate.



Every Christmas season for the past six years, Grant's Auto Service in Palmerston has been home to the Adopt-a-Family tree.

Amy Habermehl, co-owner with her husband Grant, said she wanted to find a way to give back to families in need. She found

“We’re a small-time business, we’re not big, and we’re people ... when (customers) come in, and we’re able to support something like this, they get to know us a little bit better.”

- AMY HABERMEHL,
CO-OWNER GRANT'S AUTO SERVICE

the Children's Foundation's Adopt-a-Family program, which matches donors with families during the Christmas season. Donors shop for the family's "needs" and "wishes" so the children have gifts to open on Christmas.

Most of the program's families in northern Wellington County are served through Grant's Auto Service. Habermehl takes the families' needs and wishes and divides them up onto individual paper stars on a tree in the front of her shop.

"Families can now come in and take one

gift off the tree, and it's a lot easier financially for them," she explained.

The stars go up the day after Remembrance Day, and she said most of the stars are quickly spoken for by individuals, churches and businesses.

"I started it because my kids were needing that check," she said.

"We need to understand that Christmas is about giving, not receiving."

In 2017, 16 families were matched with donors and each year it gets a little bit bigger. Habermehl waits until all the gifts come back before she starts shopping for her donations, to ensure no one is left out.

"My family takes a family ... I wait until the end, and then we find what didn't get chosen off the tree, and that's what my family (donates)," she said.

"The business, we always pick up whatever is left."

The employees also help out with packaging and delivering the presents.

"I feel like they can be proud of where they work, I hope, knowing that we do things in the community," said Habermehl.

Corporate and individual donations account for 42% of the Children's Foundation of Guelph and Wellington budget. About 35% of all donors are businesses.

"Without corporate donations, there

would be many children in our community going without,” said Glenna Banda, executive director of the Children’s Foundation of Guelph and Wellington.

“It’s wonderful to see these businesses investing back into their community by helping empower young people who are currently struggling so they can have a brighter future.”

Habermehl also runs events throughout the year to give back to the community. One event, “empower-pose yoga,” aims to raise money as well as empower women.

The first year raised \$1,000 for the Palmerston and District Hospital. The second year, funds raised were given to the Harriston Kinsmen for flood relief.

Grant’s Auto Service also supports other community and sports events in Minto.

Habermehl said her family lives by her grandfather’s motto: “you give back to the community you live in.”

“We give back to the community, and I feel as though our customers are all kind of in the same mindset ... they’re very willing to help out with whatever,” she said.

She added it is good for the community to get to know her and her business.

“We’re a small-time business, we’re not big, and we’re people ... when (customers) come in, and we’re able to support something like this, they get to know us a little bit better,” she said.



Jim Phillips, “chief cook and bottle washer” - aka owner - of Copernicus Educational Products in Arthur, said he had an epiphany in 2009.

He had been giving personally to Nature Conservancy of Canada for many years, but he thought he could incorporate giving back into his business and also involve employees.

Copernicus became a corporate sponsor around that time. In 2017, it donated \$55,000 to Nature Conservancy.

Gradually, the company started adding more volunteerism and corporate giving into its policies.

One such program is Trees for Schools, which supplies seedlings and seed packets to schools in southern Ontario. It started in 2009 with a 1,200-seedling donation. To date, the company has donated over 115,000 trees and 5,000 wildflower seed packets. The employees help package and distribute the trees.

The company is also involved with the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada’s roots and shoots program, the World Wildlife Fund in China



JULIA SCULLION AND JIM PHILLIPS
COPERNICUS EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS

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- JIM PHILLIPS, OWNER, COPERNICUS EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS

and My Classroom Needs’ outdoor education support.

“I think it’s part of a bigger picture, so we overall are just trying to become a more socially, environmentally responsible company because ... up until 2009 it really was almost an afterthought,” said Phillips.

“I started to realize we need to be more a responsible company because manufacturing is so focused on consumption and we’re a manufacturer.

“We’re a bit of a drain on the planet, so we basically need to try and do what we can to reverse some of our negative effects on the planet.”

Internally, the company is also doing what it can to support its employees’ devotion to various organizations.

During the holiday season, staff members can bring an organization to the company’s attention, and Copernicus will donate \$100 to that charity on behalf of the employee. The company has also won two awards from the Learning Partnership for its “take your kids to work day” program.

“The design team created a fantastic take

your kids to work day program that gets kids hands-on, and they actually get to design and make their own product. And they get to bring it home at the end of a day,” explained Phillips.

Copernicus has also recently implemented an employee volunteer program.

“Every employee has up to twenty hours per year of paid volunteer service,” said Julia Scullion, Copernicus’ social and environmental responsibility coordinator.

Whether the employee volunteers during work hours or non-work hours, Copernicus will reimburse them for that time, she explained.

“That again is how we’re hoping to involve our employees in encouraging them to participate in not just what the company cares about, but individually what they care about,” said Scullion.

She said the company is trying to bridge the disconnect between the interests of the company and the interests of its people.

Phillips added many companies are moving in that direction.

“My hope is that it helps our employees be more motivated and happier knowing that the

goal isn't just sales, growth and profits - that there's hopefully a greater good that we're doing," he said.

Copernicus has a considerable donation objective.

"Our goal is to donate/spend 1% of our sales on social and environmental projects and causes," said Phillips.

The donation is split between environmental education, global sustainability and local/community initiatives.

Copernicus is also working on becoming B-Corp certified, which means the company meets "rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency," according to the B-Corp website. There are more than 2,100 certified businesses in the world.

Scullion said many businesses believe it takes a lot of income to be able to become a more environmentally and socially responsible company.

"It can be a little bit intimidating, but I think the most important thing is just to do whatever you can," she said.

"You don't have to make some huge commitment right away ... it's whatever you can do, so I think an incremental approach is helpful."



KATIE POPE

"I think that it's important for all companies in small and large towns to find that organization that's true to their heart and be devoted."

- KATIE POPE, OWNER OF MOTION ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING LTD.



Katie Pope, owner of Motion Electrical Contracting Ltd. in Fergus, saw how important Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) was to her life, so she wanted to give back any way she could.

"I actually was a little sister," she said.

"I wanted to be able to give back in whatever capacity I could because I saw the difference that it could make."

Pope sits on several committees with BBBS of Centre Wellington and her business, which she owns with her husband Ryan, sponsors many BBBS events, including the Big Night Out Gala, Bowl for Kid's Sake and more.

Employees of MEC also put together a bowling team for the Bowl for Kids event.

"They know that it is an important, integral part me," said Pope.

She added giving back to the community is a great team-building exercise for the employees.

"It just helps build that morale and company culture," she said.

Being a part of the community is essential to Pope and her business.

"I think that it's important for all companies in small and large towns to find that organization that's true to their heart and be devoted," she said.

For BBBS of Centre Wellington, about 12% of its 2017 revenues came from corporate donations and sponsorships.

"By partnering with local businesses we get the opportunity to educate them about why we exist, what the need is for our programs, and how they can make a difference," said Kristen Drexler, executive director of BBBS of Centre Wellington.

She added corporate donations allow the organization to run larger events that cannot be funded through grant money.

For Pope, it is important to show that her business is socially responsible.

"I feel like we need to support each other and if the community is supporting us then

it's important that business owners ... support our community on various levels," said Pope.

It also allows her to be recognized by her customers.

"It's great to be associated with a charitable organization," she said.

"It feels good, and you're making a difference, so you're kind of hitting all of the bases in one."



Not only is giving back good for employee morale, community relations and the charitable organization, but it can also help during tax time.

Bud Arnold, tax manager with Collins Barrow Guelph Wellington Dufferin, said there

“Nobody likes to pay taxes, so if you’re in the situation that you’re going to be paying a lot of taxes, maybe you’d rather give some money to a good cause than to the government’s cause.”

- BUD ARNOLD, TAX MANAGER,
COLLINS BARROW GUELPH
WELLINGTON DUFFERIN



are two ways for businesses and corporations to write-off donations come tax time.

“The easier way that they might not think of all the time, it’s just calling it a promotional expense or advertising,” said Arnold.

Both sole-proprietorship and corporations can write-off a sponsorship to the charity if there is a documented promotional or advertising benefit to the company.

For corporations, a traditional donation can

be deducted taxable income.

“The other way is more the traditional charitable donation for philanthropic or altruistic reasons; that you’re giving for the sake of giving, to support whatever good cause there is,” said Arnold.

“Those donations have to be made to a registered charity, and they are limited for corporations ... you can only deduct up to 75% of your net income.”

For sole-proprietorship, the traditional donations can be claimed on a personal tax return, up to 75% of net income, for a tax credit.

“Nobody likes to pay taxes, so if you’re in the situation that you’re going to be paying a lot of taxes, maybe you’d rather give some money to a good cause than to the government’s cause,” Arnold said, laughing.

He added it could be a good way to help keep employees engaged.

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