

Employee Ownership and Community Commitment

Where does the sense of individual and community well-being found by David Erdal in his study of towns in Italy (see page 1) come from? A hint at the answer to this question can be found here in Ohio. Employee-owned companies have well-established programs to help their communities and provide leadership for a variety of community projects.

Helping Fire-fighters

Disaster struck New York City and Pennsylvania on September 11, and by September 13 Will-Burt sales manager **Dan Farster** was on the road to the site of the downed airliner in Somerset PA, hauling a Night Scan vertical mast and light tower with 9,000 watts of light. Earlier, local authorities in Pennsylvania confirmed that the firm's services might be needed at the crash site. **The Will-Burt Company**, based in Orrville, produces five models of light towers, including the Night Scan.

"As a supplier to the fire, rescue, and law enforcement markets, we are committed to support the men and women whose lives are on the line everyday protecting citizens," said Jeff Evans, President and COO. Will-Burt donated a light tower to the New York City Fire Department through The Fire Truck Fund: A Gift from the People of Greater Akron; and the firm's employee-owners gave direct donations to the families of NYC firefighters and police officers; the company matching donations 100%. The Will-Burt Company, which is 100% employee-owned by its 320 employee-owners, is a world leader in the manufacture of pneumatic telescoping masts.

A large box of batteries and boots were sent to New York firefighters by **Reuther Mold & Manufacturing Company** and the firm's 80 worker-owners donated to The Fire Truck Fund.

"Reuther Mold's worker-owners were extremely generous in response to the September 11 tragedy", said **Tom Winslow**, RMM's HR Director. This year the company also donated \$15,000 in their annual giving campaign to United Way, the Haven of Rest, and Good Neighbors. The firm sponsors a barrel for Goodwill at their facility each holiday season and also sponsors participants in the annual American Heart Association Walk with pledges matched 100% by the Company.

As **Sharon Companies** President and CEO **R.C. Coles** put it "Our employees are pleased to be able to give the gift

of life." The firm, with 112 employees, sponsored a blood donor drive in December.

A chili cook-off, prepared by the managers at **ComDoc's** distribution center in Tallmadge, contributed to the \$1700 that ComDoc raised locally for the Fire Truck Fund.

Concrete Technology Incorporated set aside \$2,676 for ESOP Month gifts and donated these funds to September 11 relief instead. "Their response was in the CTI spirit," explained Accounting Manager **Melissa Nicholson**, "because each year our ESOP Communications Committee plans events that benefit our employees, our company, and our community."

Helping Families

During 2001 CTI's ESOP Committee hosted a blood drive at the Springboro plant, raised money for "Feed the Hungry" at Thanksgiving and "adopted" a family for Christmas. CTI's 230 employees own 100% of the firm, which is a manufacturer of architectural precast concrete exterior cladding. "We are currently setting our agenda for 2002 and plan to get even more involved in the community," added Nicholson.

The employee-owners at **Dave Fox Contracting**, a residential remodeling firm in Columbus, built a playhouse in 2001. The playhouse was raffled off with proceeds going to the Make A Wish Foundation. The twenty employee-owners of Dave Fox Contracting also donate to Habitat for Humanity. Their website contains more information on their community spirit: <http://www.davfox.com>

The tradition at **The Ruhlin Company** in Sharon Center, OH, is to adopt an organization or a family for the holiday. Ruhlin's 70 employee-owners adopted a closed playground this year. The firm, which specializes in general construction and construction management, collected money to replace the equipment and play area at a local battered women's shelter, and will provide the labor and equipment to redesign and upgrade the site with a large sand box, new swing sets, tetherball, and a basketball court. "Our company and employees give generously to our holiday projects," explained **Gabrielle Kline**. "This year's project is especially exciting because we will be impacting many children for several years to come." The Ruhlin Company is 60% employee-owned.

"We have a tradition here at **Joseph Industries** that started in the 1980s," said **Lucy Zauner**, "through our Help-



One-Eyed Becca



(Top Left) Night Scan vertical mast and light tower donated by the Will-Burt Company to the New York City Fire Department; (Top Right) Sean Laukert, Hector Perez, and Paul Boehler, employee-owners of Dave Fox Contracting, construct the front door post and railing of the playhouse (in background) to be raffled off for the donations to the Make-A-Wish Foundation; (Bottom Right) Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron staffers (l to r) William Considine, President & CEO, Georgette Constantinou, Administrative Director of Psychiatry, Neurology and Developmental Pediatrics and advisor to the Parent Advisory Council, Joyce Swords, Coordinator of the Parent Mentor Program, Mary Yeager, Vice-President of Patient Services, and Riley Lochridge, President & CEO of ComDoc and initial funder of the Parent Mentor Program, ; (Bottom Left) Becca Ward, Receptionist at Kraft Fluid Systems, "mugs" for the camera during their "Jail-and-Bail" charity event; (Center) (l to r) David Casenhiser, YSI Foundation Trustee; Gayle Rominger, Vice President and General Manager, YSI Environmental; Rosalie Catalano, YSI Foundation Trustee; Susan Miller, YSI Foundation Trustee; Jim Patterson, OSU Board Trustee.

ing Hands group we reach out to share with families whose holiday season needs a helping hand. We raise money through raffle fundraisers throughout the month of December supported by our suppliers, local merchants, and all our 65 employee-owners who purchase the raffle tickets. We also collect food and toys. We typically provide six families with a holiday dinner, a pantry full of food staples, and gifts for the children." The 100% employee-owned firm is presently housed at their new headquarters in Streetsboro.

Christmas Baskets are a tradition that dates way back at **Xtek**, and it is a tradition that is entirely employee-driven. Led by Christmas Basket guru, **Kim Donnelly**, employees collect money, buy food and other goods, assemble the baskets and deliver them. Management does not get involved at all except to match what the employees donate. The Cincinnati firm's 310 employee-owners produce gears, crane wheels, geared couplings, and forged steep rolls, and they also fund the Xtek Foundation which gives about \$90,000 each year to area non-profits such as United Way, the Fine Arts Fund, community funds, and educational institutions.

Helping Kids

The employee-owners of **Kraft Fluid Systems** go to Jail and Bail, a fundraiser for Camp Cheerful, a summer camp for physically and mentally challenged children. Employees are arrested at work and taken to jail at the camp where they raise their own bail from calls to employees, friends, family and community businesses. Only after raising bail can they return to work. A team of Kraft employees competes each year in the Strongsville Education Foundation "World Series of Trivia Contest" to support Strongsville schools. Some of Kraft's 45 employees participate on the World Series team and others help raise about \$15,000 each year for local schools.

A Community Service Innovation

ComDoc partner **Joyce Swords** launched the Parent Mentoring Program at Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron, working at the hospital for 20 hours of her 40-hour workweek for two years, with ComDoc's full support. ComDoc President **Riley Lochridge** liked Swords' idea and the funds to cover her work at the hospital came from contributions by ComDoc and other donors who Lochridge contacted. Swords' idea—to give parents of children with special healthcare needs someone to talk to who knows how the hospital works and can understand what the parents are going through—was inspired by her own daughter's courageous battle with leukemia and the support other parents provided her. Now the program has twenty trained mentors and a new coordinator. "Dreams can come true," said Joyce, "with the help of many people who believe in your dream."

Helping Wetlands and Rivers

Two community projects spotlight how **YSI Incorporated** supports its corporate purpose of "providing innovative technology solutions to sustain the environment and enhance life" through education and community involvement.

The YSI Foundation, the philanthropic arm of YSI Incorporated, works with and supports many different community projects, especially those that are close to the company's mission on enriching human life and the environment. The foundation pledged \$200,000 towards a \$2.8 million project to build the Wetland Research and Education Building located at the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park on Ohio State's campus in Columbus. "The center really supports a lot of what YSI is doing in ecology and environmental sustainability," said **Susan Miller**, a trustee of the YSI Foundation.

The center will feature wetland sensors, water quality and quantity monitoring systems, "swamp cams," and laboratories. Information from the monitoring systems will be on view for visitors and also go over the Internet for study around the world.

YSI also supports the **Children's Water Festival**, an annual environmental science workshop for 2,500 students at the 4th-5th grade levels. The Festival is held on the University of Dayton's campus early in May. The primary sponsor is the City of Dayton Water Department, with leadership from Miami Valley Earth Central and the Well Field Protection Fund Board. The event is designed to increase children's awareness about groundwater, while stressing the importance of responsible action, use, and protection of all our Earth's resources. YSI has an employee-owner on the planning committee, staffs the adult registration booth, and puts on workshops and exhibitions. At the 2001 festival, YSI's **Chris Knickerbocker** taught "Clues From Cabbage", a workshop on cabbage juice as a natural indicator to estimate pH. YSI's **Yolanda Stickle** taught about the kinds of things found in water and how water is tested.

YSI, which has 320 employee-owners, is headquartered in Yellow Springs.

Supporting Entrepreneurship and Education

Will-Burt employees raise money and teach entrepreneurship and applied business concepts for the local Junior Achievement organization. In addition, the company supports college tuition for the dependents of employees and funds scholarships at the University of Akron's Wayne College.

YSI supports college scholarships for employees' dependents and other students at local high schools and the Women in Engineering Scholarship fund at the University of Dayton. oaw