

# BEYOND THE FEEL GOOD

## Community service is about giving back + good business

The following is an excerpt from the October, 2009 prevue magazine written by Greg Oates.



ACCESS DMC's [ACCESS Destination Services] Extreme Military Makeover

The benefits surrounding volunteer community service extend beyond the participant's personal sense of satisfaction. There is a business case to be made, too. Volunteering builds brand equity, attracts progressive-minded talent, fuels company morale and builds stronger relationships between associates and clients. And that's just for starters.

"Community service and voluntourism is beyond a doubt the best way for any group to instantly bond," says Marcia Willett, president of MW & Associates and former senior director of corporate events at Ingram Micro Systems.

After Willet participated with Prevue in a volunteer event with the US Virgin Islands, she added, "Even the most reluctant participants quickly become engrossed in the ability to make a difference in the community. It's the most worthwhile event endeavor you will ever plan and organize." And demand for these events is growing. In the book *Keeping the Millennials* (2009), authors Dr Sujansky and Dr Ferri-Reed argue that Millennials, born since 1980, "show a preference for employment with an organization that engages in community service, ...and permits employees an opportunity to volunteer times or services."

### THE 21ST CENTURY DMC

"In the last couple years, volunteering among corporate groups has become so prevalent to the point where it's almost an expectation for some groups," says Bethany Johnson, associate producer at One Smooth Stone. The company offers CSR programs from Hawaii to Uganda. "Part of it is the visibility as more and more planners are sharing best practices and word spreads," she says. "I think it's more of a corporate trend than a meetings trend."

In May last year, Bethany helped BMC Software bring an incentive group of 800 qualifiers and guests to the Big Island of Hawaii. Part of the trip included a 5K run/walk event, and the company agreed to donate a certain amount of money per participant to the Daniel Sayre Foundation. The non-profit raises money to equip the underfunded local fire department, which requires an inordinate amount of rescue equipment due to the island's diverse variety of ecosystems. Over 200 people joined in, and the group surprised Laura and Daniel Sayre on the beach with a check for \$10,000.

"They were blown away," says Johnson. "And it's not just about the dollar amount. It's about getting people together and being excited about something

as a group. You always get more out of these events than you put in."

[ACCESS Destination Services](#) has developed a growing roster of volunteer opportunities. One is sprucing up houses owned by US military families with a spouse deployed overseas. A recent Extreme Military Makeover included 70 attendees helping one very thankful woman at home alone with her to-do list, followed by a big dinner.

"There has to be that emotional tie-in for these events to really soar," says Jennifer Miller, general manager of ACCESS. "When we ask clients what was their favorite part of an event, the CSR program almost always ranks at the top of the list."

In San Diego, another recent program involved 60 male execs visiting 75 high school boys at New Haven Youth Center. Together, they built bookcases, learned about electricity and carpentry and spent time painting together. Miller describes New Haven as a "last chance kids facility that teaches real life learning skills to at-risk foster kids who've never been adopted." But the first time Miller planned the event, she wasn't sure if the kids would take to the idea.

"We thought the boys might be a little cynical but they were just thrilled and gave the men such a huge thank you," she says. "And the guys were touched, you know, I was surprised. It's not very often you see 50 out of 60 grown men with tears in their eyes."

So how do you sell such an event to a planner?

"Well, it's like every other program," says Miller. "It's giving a group an experience they can't find at home. Most people can't make such a dramatic impact on their own."

written by Greg Oates

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