

The following is an excerpt from the July 2011 *Successful Meetings* feature article written by Andrea Doyle

WHEN IT COMES TO CSR EVENTS, BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER. HERE'S WHY.

READER ROI

CVBs, DMCs and hotels can help identify the best local projects and beneficiaries

Putting a name and face to a recipient can make a CSR project even more impactful

A meeting group helps spruce up the home of a military family in San Diego



Making a Big Impact On a Small Group

More often than not, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs skew toward “the bigger, the better” — painting schools used by hundreds, cleaning beaches or parks enjoyed by thousands, or collecting supplies to send to innumerable troops overseas or to victims of natural disasters.

These programs fill an incredible needs gap and benefit tremendous numbers of people the world over. But sometimes, CSR projects that benefit just a handful of people — one military family with a dad serving in Iraq, one couple who lost their home to Hurricane Katrina, or one little girl whose parents can't afford furniture for her bedroom — can leave a more nuanced imprint on a group. Because the beneficiaries of these programs have names and faces that the attendees can connect with, the impact can be significantly more substantial.

Extreme Makeover

When independent global safety organization Underwriters Laboratories (UL) chose San Diego for its meeting, the group wanted to incorporate a CSR event into the program. Louise Olson, president of Oak Park, IL-based Zest Events, an independent meeting management firm that was responsible for planning the UL meeting, turned to San Diego's *ACCESS* Destination Services for help.

The result was Extreme Military Makeover, a teambuilding event for 70 attendees who came to the aid of a young military wife who found herself unable to keep up with home



maintenance while her husband was deployed on his third tour in Iraq. She was only told that she and her three children were being treated to a trip to Legoland for the day. While they were gone, the UL group replaced her fences, landscaped the lawn, caulked, painted, and installed shelves in the garage.

“When working with a smaller group, they receive so much more,” says Jennifer Miller, general manager of *ACCESS* Destination Services San Diego and Los Angeles. “With this particular program, we were able to redo their whole yard and beautify their house. ... You can make a bigger impact.”

ACCESS does research to find out what a company's particular CSR philosophy is before making a recommendation on projects. Being an active member of the community makes it easy to ascertain who needs what. Miller says the average cost per attendee to take part in a CSR teambuilding activity is \$100 to \$200.

“The members of the group were beyond thrilled to be helping this family. This was a multinational group, and many had never held a shovel or hammer before. They were happy to be doing something that helped someone else. No one dragged their heels,” explains Olson. “The woman we were helping was visibly affected throughout the program. She broke down in tears several times and told the group, ‘There is hope. There is somebody out there who really does care.’ ” **SM**