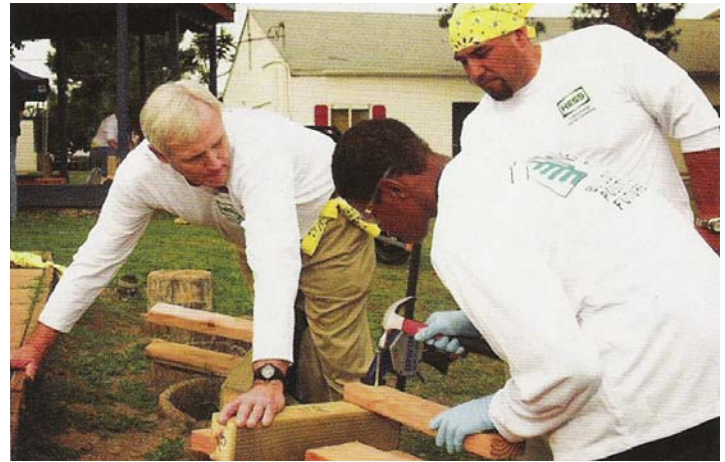


Excerpt from an article written by Michael Bassett for *Best Events California*, Summer 2009

Building and Bonding

HOW HESS EXECUTIVE TURNED AN ANNUAL EVENT INTO A PLATFORM FOR HELPING AT-RISK ADOLESCENTS



Above and left: Hess execs team up with San Diego teens.

WHILE GLOBAL ENERGY giant Hess Corp. has long made social responsibility a valued part of its corporate philosophy, formally inserting community components into its corporate meetings at the senior level is a more recent development.

According to Hess corporate planner Jennifer Leto, community activity at senior executive events, such as the annual Exploration and Production Leadership Conference, used to be conducted on a volunteer, on-your-own-time basis. But when Leto and her small conference team looked at the issue a few years ago, they recommended that senior executives do this in a more structured way to set an example for the rest of the company. "And now it's become a standard part of the program," she said.

THE RIGHT PROJECT

While deciding on the value of a corporate social responsibility (CSR) meeting component is fairly straightforward, implementing it at a high-level event like the Leadership Conference is more complicated.

First of all, the 75 executives who attended the conference – a four-day, three-night event held in February at the Four Seasons Resort Aviara in San Diego – are scattered throughout the globe. While half of them are based in North America, the others have to get to the conference from such distant locations as the United Kingdom, West Africa, and Southeast Asia.

"These guys – and they're all men – want to make the most of their time together," Leto emphasizes. "We hardly even have them together in one place at the same time, and there's so much they want to cover. They need to spend a lot of time in sessions working on problems and strategies."

Which means that because their time is so precious, the CSR component must be planned very carefully and integrated into the agenda to make the best possible use of every hour.

One full afternoon is dedicated to the CSR component, and the program must meet conditions: the cause served must be worthy, and the CSR event itself must have real teambuilding value.

In planning the Leadership Conference, Leto worked with Access Destination Services of San Diego.

Leto says she usually looks for something involving children and education, and tasked [the team] to come up with three options. Even then, after whittling down the CSR options to three possibilities, "it's still very difficult to make a decision," Leto says.

The challenge is further compounded, according to Jennifer Miller, general manager of Access Destination Services, because the

same attendees of this particular group have been coming to the same conference for three years running in San Diego. "Even though the pattern of the program feels the same, we need to give them something different each year," Miller says, and that extends to the CSR program.

The first year, the CSR/teambuilding event involved a "road rally" that ended up in a go-cart arena and concluded with the attendees building bicycles for underprivileged children. Last year, Hess executives renovated a playground in North San Diego. This year, Leto says, she was looking for something different. The ideal project was one that would best match the interests and talents of her attendees. "They're all engineers and scientists, very hands-on kinds of guys," she says, so she wanted something that provided more variety than a typical "Habitat for Humanity" type of project.

In the end, they decided to do something for a group called New Haven Youth and Family Services.

PUTTING EXPERTISE TO WORK

New Haven is a residential and educational facility that provides treatment for boys ages 8-17 with emotional and behavioral challenges. The facility was badly in need of residential and classroom



Members of New Haven Youth and Family Services

refurbishing, technological upgrades, and “an overall facelift,” says Miller.

The 75 Hess executives were bussed to the facility at around noon the next day, the second day of the Leadership Conference, “and we definitely put their expertise to good use,” Leto says. The executives were divided into groups and tackled six different projects.

If the project involved rewiring electricity, we matched that with the Hess person with that kind of expertise,” Leto explains. The projects included the construction of an outdoor classroom, the installation of basketball hoops and soccer nets, the refurbishment of an indoor classroom, and the replacement of IT equipment, along with other tasks.

One key project was the installation and outfitting of an onsite trailer with tools and equipment for the facility’s youth construction program. “New Haven has a wood shop and they try to teach the necessary carpentry skills they can use to give back to the community, whether it’s making minor repairs in homes, or fixing tool sheds,” says Leto.

While a lot of effort is made at New Haven to provide the residents with skills – such as carpentry – they can use when out in the world, there are academic hurdles to overcome as well. “Many of these kids are

in and out of foster care, in and out of skills, and their reading levels are two or three years behind their peers,” says Leto. One of the Hess projects involved the supply and installation of software for the Read 180 program, a comprehensive reading intervention program for children reading below a proficient level.

Throughout the afternoon, and from project to project, the Hess executives teamed up with the New Haven kids. “Our attendees really engaged with the kids,” says Leto. “So as far as the teambuilding aspect was concerned, our guests worked together and did a lot of bonding, but they bonded with the kids as well.” And they got jobs done that needed doing. It was a win-win situation for everyone.” **BE**