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Ensuring Communities



Journalists find cynicism comes easily. Nearly every day, we're bombarded with a string of e-mails, press releases and clippings about different companies and individuals who have donated their time, money or both for something in their communities. "So what?" a former newspaper colleague once remarked to me about the practice. "That happens every day — it's not news."

But given the economic times the country faces, I now question that logic — not an easy task for a newsman. How else am I to reconcile an inbox flooded every day with tales of a collapsing economy — layoffs, on-the-rise businesses and nonprofits struggling — with the string of press releases, announcements and mentions of community service and charity which continue to pepper my daily dish of bad news?

Wait a minute. Maybe this is news. That realization dawned on me earlier this month as I sat in a meeting of the MetroHartford Alliance, the chamber of commerce for Connecticut's capital. The meeting was about efforts to transform the region's struggling school system. One of the first things anyone mentioned was an insurance company.

Travelers — which has its property/casualty operations based a few blocks from that particular meeting — had just recently announced the commitment of \$1 million to education reform in Hartford. That money, desperately needed, will go directly to support the reform agenda of the Hartford Public Schools. Plus, another \$500,000 will go to organizations and programs that serve Hartford students.

"As we battle threats of serious cuts in state education funding, it is gratifying to see Travelers put its faith and resources behind programs that work," said Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski. "We hope that others will follow."

Across the region and the country, despite a soft market, difficult outlook and any other obstacle worth mentioning, insurance companies, brokerages and agents continue to ante up time, effort and money when it comes to being a part of their communities. What could be more newsworthy than that?

Here's a quick sample of some other efforts from around New England that have been sent to me recently:

— In Nov., The Concord Group Insurance Cos., which insures 35,000 houses and mobile homes in Maine, created an initiative to provide \$500,000 in fuel assistance to Mainers. The state's governor called the program "a unique initiative which will help many Mainers remain safe and warm as the weather grows colder."

— In October, a similar effort by Carey, Richmond & Viking Insurance agency of Portsmouth, R.I. and the Selective Insurance Company helped to raise \$2,000 for Rhode Island Good Neighbor Energy Fund, a heating assistance program.

— In Dec., Gowrie, an insurance brokerage based in Westbrook, Conn., matched donations up to \$25,000 for those who contributed The Shoreline Soup Kitchens & Pantries. The result: Nearly \$75,000 was raised.

All these efforts, big and small, have meant a real impact for the communities these agents and companies serve. Countless others also make an impact every day, even if their tales never find their way into the pages of *Insurance Journal*.

It's easy to take community service for granted, but no one should. After all, ensuring communities is what this business is all about, right?

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