

Ottawa Community Relations Efforts Give Local Families Hope

Employees who question the impact one person can have need only look at Avnet Electronics Marketing's Ottawa, Ontario, branch. What started as one employee's effort to show her children how fortunate they are has grown into a branch-wide focus on one organization that involves sponsorship, fundraising, collections and even teaming with a supplier.

Several years ago, Account Manager Linda Mills and her husband wanted to involve their children in a charitable project. After doing some research, they found an organization called Shepherds of Good Hope (Shepherds), which had a Christmas Hamper program for people to provide Christmas dinner and gifts for families in need. The experience the Mills family had was so rewarding that Linda brought the idea to her coworkers in the Ottawa office.

For the last six years, Avnet Ottawa has sponsored two families of four, not only providing groceries for a complete Christmas dinner and staples for six other meals, but also two or three gifts for each member of the adopted family. "The money to cover this came directly from our employees' pockets and not through fundraising efforts," says Linda.

Fundraising soon followed, though. When Avnet Ottawa hosted a golf tournament and charity auction for customers and suppliers in 2006, the \$5,300 raised was donated to Shepherds, who used the money to build a fenced-in break area at its facility. "Previously, women participating in Shepherds' drug treatment program who went outside on breaks for fresh air or cigarettes were approached by drug dealers trying to pull them back into the life they were trying so hard to leave," says Linda. "The golf tournament raised enough money to build an area where the women can go outdoors without fear."

The golf tournament also inspired Avnet Ottawa customers and suppliers to get involved. After hearing Shepherds Executive Director Paul Sourcie speak at the golf tournament, several companies liked the Christmas Hamper idea and began participating on their own.

Avnet Ottawa became further involved with Shepherds last year by becoming a \$1,000 sponsor of its annual Beat Beethoven Run, which features 5 and 8K races as well as a half marathon. In addition to being a sponsor again in 2008, the office anticipates having employees participate.

When December 2007 rolled around, the Avnet Ottawa office decided it wanted to do even more and contacted Shepherds to see what else was needed. After learning Shepherds receives many boxed and canned goods but little meat, employees began watching for sales and filling up their freezers. When the regional manager of Actel, a key supplier, contacted Linda for Hamper information and learned Avnet was collecting meat instead, he asked if they could join the project. Ultimately employees at both companies collected 400 pounds of pork, beef and chicken, which was delivered to the soup kitchen the week before Christmas.

Not only does Avnet's Ottawa office know one employee can make a difference, but it is also a great example of how Avnet locations can focus on one organization and grow their efforts from donations and sponsorships to involving employee volunteers and suppliers in community relations outreach.