

Corporate Volunteering-- Getting Down To Business

Gerardo De Leon, 16, of Houston, gets up early every morning this summer to go to his job at Tenneco Inc., where he works in the photography department. It's more than a job. It's an investment in his future.

Gerardo, who will be a high school junior this fall, wants to become the first person in his family ever to attend college. Without Tenneco his goal might be an impossible dream.

Through the company's employee volunteer program, Gerardo has a mentor to encourage and help him with school and planning for the future. His summer job money will help pay for college. And he has a good shot at a Tenneco scholarship.

Tenneco is one of hundreds of major U.S. corporations that help out in their communities, according to a recent survey by The Conference Board and The Points of Light Foundation.

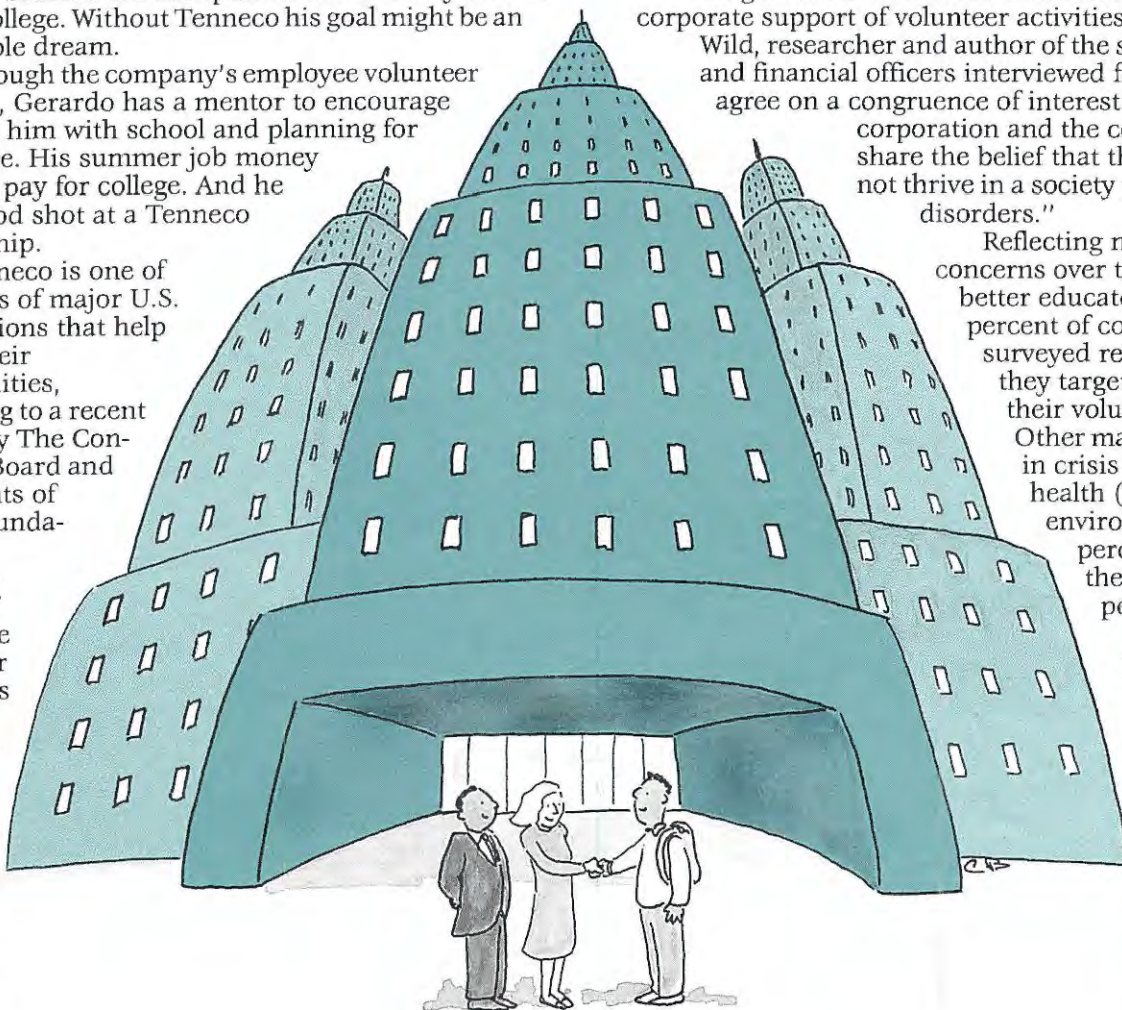
The study, of corporate volunteer programs in 454 U.S. corporations, found that 92 percent of the companies encourage

employee involvement in volunteer activities and 83 percent offer company-sponsored volunteer projects. Sixty-eight percent give paid hours off to employees for volunteer activities during the work day; 68 percent also loan personnel to assist nonprofits with specific projects.

Enlightened self-interest is an underlying reason for corporate support of volunteer activities, says Cathleen Wild, researcher and author of the study. "Executive and financial officers interviewed for this study agree on a congruence of interest between the corporation and the community. They share the belief that the company will not thrive in a society plagued by social disorders."

Reflecting nationwide concerns over the need for a better educated work force, 74 percent of companies surveyed responded that they target education in their volunteer activities. Other major areas: youths in crisis (47 percent), health (47 percent), the environment (41 percent), the homeless (41 percent).

Tenneco's partnership with Jefferson Davis High began in 1981 with mentoring and tutoring programs like the one Gerardo is in. The company has expanded its involvement to offer other pro-



grams, including dropout prevention, leadership training for students and college scholarships.

The scholarships aren't just for the brilliant. They are available for all hard-working students who meet requirements which include a 2.5 grade-points average, three years of math and required summer study. Each scholarship is worth \$4,000 (\$1,000 a year).

Gerardo is working toward a scholarship with the help of his mentor, Mike Moran, a marketing representative for Tenneco Gas. Mentors are matched with small groups of students at the beginning of their freshman year, says Oksana Gensior, business partnership coordinator at the school. Mentors and students meet every other week for about an hour at lunchtime during the school year. Moran will help Gerardo and three other students prepare for college—SAT tests, sending out applications.

"I'm sold on the program," says Moran, who's been a mentor for two years. "When Gerardo and the other guys graduate, I'll sign up for a new group of students."

Other corporations also have ambitious education-related volunteer programs in place.

- Cooper & Lybrand, a national accounting firm headquartered in New York City, sponsors volunteer efforts nationwide including counseling and tutoring inner-city youths, showing students how to run a business, creating summer jobs for youths, and helping part-time employees earn high school graduation.

- Intel Corporation has a partnership with Palmdale Elementary School in Phoenix, AZ Intel employees can choose from a menu of activities that vary in focus and time required. They include tutoring, a Saturday School, math/science fairs and one-time special events.

Among other big-name corporations with education-related volunteer programs: ARCO Chemical Co., Amoco Corp. and Eastman Kodak Co.

To help identify community needs, corporations often turn to nonprofit agencies and the 400 Volunteer Centers across the country. In some cases, the corporation's volunteer emphasis is related to the company's product.

- Allstate Insurance Group, which began as an urban insurer, has a strong commitment to addressing problems in cities by working with local agencies such as the Lewis Street Center in Rochester, NY, to provide day-care, a foster grandparent program and after-school tutoring.

- Food giant Pillsbury/Grand Metropolitan sponsors a "Store to Door" grocery delivery service in Minneapolis to senior citizens in high-rise housing.

- BAMA Foods support USA Harvest, a massive nationwide, all-volunteer food distribution effort.

The survey also asked corporations what kind of records they keep on their volunteer programs. It found that most of the information gathered is anecdotal: 61 percent say they get some sort of feedback from the community or employees' testimonials. About a third of the companies kept track of hours volunteered. On average, 12.5 percent of the work force participated in the employee volunteer programs.

The beneficiaries of corporate volunteering praise the impact of such programs. Emily Cole, principal of Jefferson Davis High, says the partnership with Tenneco has made some visible changes, including a decline in the dropout rate from 65 percent to 47 percent; and about

a 100-point increase in average SAT scores.

"We couldn't do without the assistance of Tenneco personnel," says Cole. "They have given us more than time and talent . . . They have introduced a value system that shows how important it is to give back. On their own, Davis students are organizing service projects and are showing an interest in making the school and the community work."

Other Highlights

- 91 percent of corporations recognize employee volunteering through article, awards, commendations.

- 60 percent survey employees about volunteer interest/involvement.

- 50 percent make community service a part of their company's mission statement.

- 41 percent employ one person to manage their volunteer programs; 37 percent use a committee or task force.

- 37 percent report the estimated annual cost of programs, excluding staff time, at less than \$5,000; 16 percent report costs of \$100,000 or more. ■

BENEFITS TO CORPORATIONS

Feeding the homeless and hungry. Teaching kids to read and do math. Helping repair homes for the elderly. The inventory of corporate good deeds stretches from coast to coast.

But what's in it for the companies that encourage and sponsor employee volunteer programs?

Many of the benefits fall in often hard-to-measure categories such as improved public image and worker morale, according to the Foundation survey. Of the 454 corporations who participated in the survey, 94 percent agree that employee volunteer programs help create "healthier communities" and 95 percent say that such programs improve the corporate image.

No formula exists to measure accurately benefits to a company's bottom line, but those who foster employee volunteer programs are convinced that the value is there, even though intangible.

To Intel plant manager Harry Hollack, part of the value is in advancing the concept of personal mastery, which he says is the cornerstone of Intel's corporate culture. "As a result of volunteer service," he says, "workers bring new attitudes and skills, fresh insights and a deeper commitment to their work."

The value to employees also are judged to be substantial in areas that are important to employee performance: 93 percent agree that volunteer programs build teamwork skills; 91 percent say they improve morale; 90 percent say they help attract better employees; and 77 percent say they help the company keep valued employees.

Carol Ondrake, who serves on a hiring team at GE Capital Consumer Card Co. in Cincinnati, agrees that volunteer activities are attractive to prospective hires. "We want to be the employer of choice. We must provide our people these ways of serving and getting to know the community and getting to know each other."

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