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# WOMEN



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## Women Watch

rock radio station, “The Rock FM.” Station organizers call their effort to raise start-up funds the “Strong Tower Project.”

Once on the air, the station “will be playing the kind of music that Ryan loved and our family listens to,” Sherrie says. “We felt it was time to give the kids in the community who are drawn to this type of music what they want.”



### *Sandy Hansen*

Since being featured in October/November 2009, Sandy Hansen has sharpened her professional focus and experienced rewarding outcomes. Sandy cut back on speaking engagements to attend to AgVentures, the company her husband, Randy, left her when leukemia claimed his life—just 15 months into their marriage. The business supplies feed and seed to farm customers near Cold Spring.

“The business demanded more of my attention,” Sandy says. “We’ve been fine-tuning documents and procedures to be more efficient. It’s basically a daily effort to do our best.”

Sandy was named one of “5 under 40” in the St. Cloud Times’ *ROI* magazine in 2010. Last year, she was a winner of the Upsize Growth Challenge, a contest created by *Upsize* magazine to match business owners with expert advice to reach their

goals. Sandy came across with a level of confidence that impressed her mentors who urged her to think strategically and measure results.

“We are on a really positive growth trend,” Sandy says. “2012 was the best year we ever had!”

Sandy expects 2013 to be another banner year. Her personal life is also on an upward trend. When her husband died, Sandy moved from their rural property into Cold Spring. While downsizing simplified life, she longed to own a house on a lake.

Sandy realized her dream in June 2011 when she purchased a home on the nearby chain of lakes.

The holiday season brought another gift to her life. Sandy got engaged after nearly 10 years on her own.

“Given time, your life goes through a rebuilding,” she said.



Char Hopela is an artist, journalist and student of technology. Follow her on Twitter @BelTart1.

An artistic illustration of various wine bottles and glasses on a table, with a rainbow in the background.

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A photograph of two women with brown hair, smiling warmly at the camera.

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## Philanthropy

Compassion ♥ Kindness ♥ Concern

By Ann Grunke  
Photos by Sue Dropp

In the rural community of Watkins, Minnesota, AGVenture Feed and Seed thrives under the management of owner and president, Sandy Hansen. That would satisfy most CEO's, but not Sandy. Sandy sees beyond the bottom line and into the needs of her community. For her, a successful business is one that gives back to its customers, its employees, and its community. Sandy's goal is to give ten percent of the company's net profits away each year to various needs and causes. She has a "pay it forward" state of mind.

Ten years ago, Sandy was in a very different situation. Following the death of her husband, she struggled not only with her personal loss, but also to keep the business out of bankruptcy. She had to process her grief while trying to stabilize the company. She was humbled by the outpouring of help that came her way from friends, family, employees, and the community. "I was overwhelmed by the heart of people," Sandy remembers. It took a few years, but when she could finally exhale and take stock of how far she'd come, she knew she had found a mission. Sandy recognized that both she and her business were in a better place through the generosity and support of others; she vowed to herself that she would lead a purposeful life of giving. "Giving is a goal," Sandy says, "a way of life, a responsibility.

I'll spend the rest of my life trying to give back, or pay it forward to people who may not even know me."

### Compassion for community

Financially, Sandy supports many causes in her community, some of which are related to agriculture, such as Future Farmers of America and local 4-H groups. She does this in honor of her customers. She also supports local schools by donating to sports, special events, drama club, the after-prom party, the booster club, and more. Churches are an important priority for Sandy; not just her own church but the churches of her community. She also gives to the city's Kraut 'N Wurst festival each year. When she sees a family in need due to illness or death, Sandy will be sure to help. "I once was there," Sandy says. "So I understand how that is."

Sandy is also generous with her time. She serves on the Volunteer Advisory Committee at St. Benedict's Monastery, she serves on the Economic Development Board of Watkins, the board of *Central Minnesota Women*, she is a Make-a-Wish volunteer, and she has worked as a hospice volunteer. One important way to give of her time is to be a good listener. Sandy says there have been numerous times when people have come to her and sat in her office to talk about a loved one who has been diagnosed with a serious illness. "That is the most awesome and humbling experience. They know I'll listen because I've been there." Sandy is always open to listening and vows she will never say, "not now, we're too busy." Giving of one's time is one of the most personal and generous acts of compassion.

Sandy lights up when she mentions Make-a-Wish. The boy she's working with is fascinated by how masks are made for movies. His wish is to work on the construction



of a mask with a special effects artist and learn how it's done with a goal of making masks himself. She tells me how great she felt when she left the boy's home. "Sometimes, I wonder who gets more out of it, me, or the person I'm giving to."

## Future plans

Currently, Sandy is working on creating a scholarship fund for people going into "agriculture, or an agriculture-related career." She hopes to have the fund up and running within a year or two. "We'll probably offer a few scholarships each year."

Especially important to Sandy is supporting the local 4-H groups and their participation in county and state fairs. "I don't have my own children," Sandy says, "so I kind of consider the customers' children part of me." She believes it's a way of giving back to her customers while nurturing learning and life skills in children. "We always give at Fair time for all of their Fair projects, and that just makes me so proud. They've got projects that are usually about some sort of agriculture. They're showing cattle, they're growing a garden...." Sandy has made it a goal to help with the expenses incurred by participants in 4-H projects.

Sandy looks for need, and gives on a continuing basis throughout the year. Sometimes, someone will bring a particular need to her attention, or it might be a situation that she reads about in the paper. Sandy approaches giving with an attitude of faith. "I don't look at the books, I know if we give we'll be taken care of." At the end of the year, she sits down with her bookkeeper to determine if the ten percent goal has been met. Then, they decide how to fill the gap. This past year, she did something new. She asked her employees to pick a charity or organization that was important to them to satisfy her charitable-giving goals.

## Good business allows for increased giving

As a serious business woman, Sandy sets aggressive goals for company growth every year. "I think it's our responsibility. If we grow and we're successful at growth and we have a better bottom line, then that's more

that we can impact our community by giving back." The focus of Sandy's giving is local. It feels more meaningful to give to the community that supports her and her business. She wants to enhance the lives of those around her and support civic causes that matter to her customers and employees.

Reflecting on my visit with Sandy, I was reminded of a well-known quote by Winston Churchill. "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Giving is what Sandy has chosen as her path, giving is a priority; it's how she has deliberately defined her life. If what neuroscience research suggests is true, that generosity feels good and lights up the pleasure centers of our brains, Sandy Hansen must be one very happy person.



*Ann Grunke is a freelance writer in St. Cloud where she lives with her husband.*

According to the Minnesota Council on Foundations, there are as many reasons for charitable giving as there are people. Some motivations include:

- To help fulfill a life goal or passion
- To feel a sense of value and satisfaction
- To leave a lasting imprint on society while making a significant difference
- To perpetuate a certain viewpoint or philosophy
- To unite family members around a purposeful mission
- To honor or memorialize a friend or loved one
- To give something back to a community
- To connect with others who share your interests and passions
- To express gratitude or to say "thank you"



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