

Why GIVE?

business owner, regardless of size or profit, to do something, because I know they can," he says. Indeed even in down times, he says, his company was giving money when it wasn't making money.

To Wehling, it's a matter of responsibility: "Business has gotten to the point where it's all about making your mark in the business world and moving up the corporate ladder. But it's about making your mark in the community, as well."

Giving back has benefits in the workplace, too. At Amerilab's philanthropic events and functions, office workers mix with manufacturing workers and it becomes clear to all, he says, that, "We're human. We care."



THE JOY OF GIVING

Brad Rixmann opened the first Pawn America (pawnamerica.com) in Robbinsdale in 1991 when he was in his twenties.

Since then, he's expanded the company to 23 stores around the region. While many TV viewers recognize him from Pawn America commercials, others recognize him for something else: Giving back.

Pawn America supports the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities and helped it create and launch Kids Feeding Kids. The program addresses the fact that many kids who attend local chapters of the Boys & Girls Clubs must go several hours of the day on an empty stomach.

"Maybe mom and dad are working two jobs to make ends meet," says Rixmann. "Maybe they don't go home and dinner is a bag of Frito-Lay chips." By providing a nutritious meal, he believes, the program also helps kids do better in school.

The benefit for him is the sense of belonging, the smiles on kids' faces, and getting to hear that he made a difference. "The legacy we should strive for should be the legacy of the lives we've



made a difference in," he says.

Pawn America also supports PCs for People, which provides computers at a low cost to those in need, and the Fairview Riverside Hospital's Transitional Care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health units. Rixmann and employees visit patients, some of whom have been there for months with few visitors. "We're not looking for a thank you," says Rixmann. "There are people who do so much more than us there. We just want to get the message out ... get people involved."

Rixmann learned the importance of giving thanks in part to his Lutheran education. He remembers one (and only one) lecture, and it had nothing to do with religion. It was on the joy of giving. "It's about morals and ethics," he says. "It applies to all."

RAISING AWARENESS

The Minneapolis-based advertising agency Martin Williams (martinwilliams.com) makes a point to give back by donating time, money, and pro-bono projects. Raising thousands of dollars for the local United Way, donating food and clothing to Second Harvest, and donating presents at Christmas and candy at Halloween is all part of a year's philanthropic work.

Currently the agency is doing pro-bono work for the brewer Finnegan's, which donates 100 percent of its profits to local charities. "In the advertising business we are truly blessed with the ability to raise awareness and help make a positive impact for these righteous endeavors," says Tom Moudry, the agency's president, CEO, and chief creative officer.

He says the reason to give is simple: "It will make you feel really good."

STEPPING UP

Watkins-based AgVenture Feed & Seed (agventurefeeds.com) is all

about helping farmers, whether it's providing agribusiness support, animal management services, or farm supplies.

In 2003, Sandy Hansen needed help of a much different kind. That's when her husband Randy, the company's owner and founder, was struggling against leukemia and in his final days. During his stay in the hospital, they said to each other, "When we are through this, we will give back in every way we can."

After he passed away, she faced a long grieving process and, adding to the turmoil, found herself the owner of a company in a business she knew little about. "I saw our friends and family and community step up to help out after his death and was very grateful," says Hansen, "It was my lifeline at the time."

She had been taught as a child about the importance of giving back, but "it's really enhanced when you go through a tragedy," she says.

Today, AgVenture gives to a number of causes. Community is one of its core values, so donations go to local schools, local 4-H Clubs, and local chapters of Future Farmers of America.

The company also finds ways to donate its products, including bird seed that goes to local nursing homes and animal feed to help farmers hit by hard times.

Hansen gives both personally and through AgVenture to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which helps families who have come across tragedy, much as she did.

She also uses her personal story to get the message of giving out to others. "In the last 10 years, I've done a lot of speeches on this," she says. "When we are given enough, I think it is our responsibility to help those less fortunate."

To others in the business community who are wary about donating time and money, Hansen has a few words of advice. "Try it," she says. "Watch the impact it has on your own life and your business. Are there other areas I could be spending the money we give? Absolutely. But I never miss that money."