

Your Community — Your Business

There are many reasons to get involved in your community — what's yours?

By Carrie Burns

Know what you're probably thinking: "Here's this editor telling me to give, give, give — that it's the *right* thing to do, that it will make me *feel* good about myself, that in the end it will make my business better." Well, you're partly right — I'm going to skip that stuff we already know, such as it's the

right thing to do and that it will make you feel good. I'll get right to the good stuff — promoting yourself within your community. But before I do, don't get me wrong, I'm not a heartless person; giving is great and should only be done with the right intention — to help — but if you get a little something in return, that's great

One in four Children in Oregon live in a food insecure* household

Plant A Row for the Hungry

Al's Garden Center and you Can Help Fight Hunger in Oregon

1220 N Pacific Hwy
Woodburn, OR 97071

What is Plant A Row for the Hungry?
Launched in 1995 Plant a Row for the Hungry is a public service campaign of the Garden Writers Association (GWA). GWA's goal is to help to feed the hungry by establishing Plant a Row Networks in communities everywhere. Annual PAR donations top more than 1 million pounds.

2004 Collection Goal 1000 pounds

The State of HUNGER in Oregon
Oregon remains at the top of National hunger ranking:
13.7% of households in Oregon were food insecure* - 3.4% higher than the National average
5.8% of households in Oregon were food insecure with hunger** - 2.1% higher than the National average
One in four children in Oregon live in a food insecure household
21% of households with children reported that their children had to cut or skip meals
39% of these households reported this happens every month
71% of respondents said they worry at times where their next meal is coming from
42% of households receiving Food Bank support have at least one person working
Two parent families are still the largest recipients of Food Bank support at 31%
Oregon's Poverty Rate is 11.6% while Mississippi's is 19.9%, but Oregon's "hunger rate" is 5.8% while Mississippi's is 3.7%
Oregon Food Bank supplied 59 million pounds of food in Oregon in 2003. That was 4 million more pounds of food than 2002.
*Hunger: the uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food.

How Can I Help?
In a state grown on agricultural roots, there is no reason that anyone should go hungry. Amy Bigley, Al's Director for PAR, states "Al's Garden Center is our mission to build a program that makes it easier for and encourages everyone who has a garden to assist in fighting hunger. Through this program, we strive to increase our community's awareness about the state of hunger in Oregon."
You can participate in this national program by planting additional rows of the produce to donate or share some of produce you already grow. Anyone who has a fruit tree or plants a garden knows that there is typically more produce than they and their neighbors can eat. Instead of composting your spare fruits and vegetables during harvest season bring your produce into Al's Garden Center each Sunday. Collection deliveries will be made each Monday at noon. If you don't have spare produce or are looking for another way to support the Oregon Food Bank Al's Garden Center is also looking for volunteers to deliver the donation collected to the Food Bank.
To become a volunteer contact Amy Bigley at (503) 981-1245 or abigley@al-gardencenter.com.



Left: Al's Garden Center hands out pamphlets to help customers better understand the PAR program. Top: Al's also educates children so they can participate in the program.

too. So, as you read this, please remember how important helping our fellow human beings is.

In light of recent disasters and events such as the tsunami in South Asia, California mudslides and many other unfortunate natural events such as fires and floods, it seems that this is a better time than any to give.

There are numerous opportunities to get involved — large, national programs; smaller, organized programs; and even programs designed by yourself or by your employees. Below are just a few of the many to get you started and to get the wheels in your head turning.

NATION-WIDE HELP

American Red Cross. Most of you know how the Red Cross works, but here's a refresher: When a disaster strikes anywhere in the world, the American Red Cross provides shelter, food, and health and mental health services — helping individuals and families get back to normal.

Red Cross is a fairly trusted name, and it provides many ways to partner with them, whether it be through sponsoring, co-branding, licensing, product promotions, philanthropic investments, donations of products and services, or employee involvement.

One suggestion for holding any kind of monetary collection is to match the donations of your customers. This shows customers that you are just as concerned about the world as they are.

Plant a Row for the Hungry. Plant a Row (PAR) is a program designed by Garden Writers of America to increase the awareness of hunger in America, which will in turn also increase consumer gardening.

There are more than 70 million gardeners in the United States, many of which plant vegetables and harvest more than they can consume. PAR suggests if every gardener plants one extra row of vegetables and donates their surplus to local food banks and soup kitchens, a significant impact can be made on reducing hunger.

PAR works in many different ways. One way is consumers grow their vegetables, then they bring them into a garden center. The garden center collects a large amount of these vegetables and

gives them to a PAR representative. PAR then goes through their own process of providing freshly grown product to those in need of it.

As a garden center involved in PAR, Al's Garden Center,

Woodburn, Ore., gives away a free packet of seed to its customers. At harvest time, customers can bring in produce to the garden center. Al's employees then combine it all and take

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GOOD DIRECTIONS

it directly to a local food bank. "People want to donate to the food bank but don't know how," said Lora Keddie, director of public relations at Al's. "So, this is a great way for them to do so." And, many people benefit.

Al's has decided to do it right and is making steady improvements to the program. It collected 1,400 lbs. of food in 2004 as opposed to 300 lbs. collected in 2003. There are a few things you have to commit to when partici-

pating in a program such as this. "One thing that is important is finding the staff to take care for it," said Keddie. "You don't expect it to take up that much of your time, but it does."

America In Bloom. A program

closer to home that has made leaps and bounds is America in Bloom (AIB). It is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to "Planting pride in our Communities." The program has been active since 2001, in the form of a contest and has been recognized by Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, J. Dennis, as an important project for America. Though it receives national attention, the program focuses on beautifying a more focused area: your community. Specially trained judges travel across the country evaluating and awarding communities on specific criteria.

When working with AIB you'll be exposed to some garden enthusiasts in your community. And, when residents of your community see how beautiful the area looks because of all of their hard work, they are more likely to be inspired to better their own backyards. In turn, you may draw in more customers.

SMALLER-SCALE HELP

You may feel better knowing that your donations or time is

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Find Out More

Though these are by far not the only programs you can participate in to get involved in the community. Here is the contact information for those listed in this article.

America In Bloom
www.americainbloom.org/retailers.asp
 (614) 487-1117

American Red Cross
www.redcross.org
 (800) 797-8022

Habitat for Humanity
www.habitat.org/
 (229) 924-6935

Plant a Row
www.gardenwriters.org/par
 (703) 257-1032

Toys for Tots
www.toysfortots.org
 (703) 640-9433

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going to your own community. Don't fret, there are many opportunities for giving on a smaller scale.

Habitat for Humanity. Most of you have probably heard of this program — building homes for those in need. There are a few things you can do with this program; get your employees together to give it a team effort or donate product for the landscaping.

Food, clothing and toy drives. With this idea you can involve your customers and employees. You can rely on their good hearts or you can offer some incentives. Armstrong Garden Centers in California recognized this as something important as well. Armstrong partnered with local radio stations for Toys for Tots put on by the California Highway Patrol. "We put out large boxes and informed customers and employees," said Chris Greenwood, director of public

relations of Armstrong. "It was very well received by customers." Even the employees got involved. "A few of our employees brought in toys when they came into work," said Greenwood. It is also a very popular event to hold during the holidays and many garden centers are quite successful at it (to learn more about how some garden centers were successful with drives this holiday season, turn to page 50).

Often Christmas is the time people are feeling most generous and others are most in need. Christmas/Hanukkah food and clothing drives are also very popular. Just be aware that many organizations hold drives during this time of year. Your cus-

tomers and employees may choose to give somewhere other than you. So you need to consider your customers and many other factors before committing..

School programs. Future gardeners, need I say more? Getting involved with local school districts and corporations can be very easy and rewarding. In addition to



Even children participate in programs, such as here for AIB. (Photos courtesy of America In Bloom)



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other community involvements such as Toys for Tots, Armstrong also participates in a school program. The Ocean View school district in California recently began a farm/gardening program.

Armstrong gives the district, made up of 11 elementary schools, a discount on product and sends employees over to the schools to help out. "I was very impressed when the Orange

County Farm Bureau (also involved in the program) held a get together, and we got to see one of the schools that devoted space to many farm animals, from sheep to chickens," said

Greenwood. It was then that he knew this was a good program to be involved in.

Getting involved in a youth program not only helps children learn, it helps the whole industry. When you introduce the hobby of gardening to a person of any age it is often contagious — kind of like paying it forward. The more consumers we have contributing to the industry, the more we will have to give.

So, while giving to or volunteering for worthy causes is a good thing to do, it has many other benefits. There's the exposure to customers — new, loyal or even future ones. "It of course helps a lot," said Greenwood. "But, we aren't in this for a lot of exposure."

There is even the possibility of tax breaks. The criteria for tax deduction varies greatly based on many factors — so many, we'll save that for its own article.

CAUTION

As unfortunate as it may be, there are those out there who will take advantage of generous people and businesses. So, as you are considering giving to any organization or charity, it is important to make sure you are giving to an organization or program that is legit. One way to find out this information is through the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. Working much like the Better Business Bureau, the Wise Giving Alliance provides detailed reports on more than 400 charitable organizations, informing donors whether the organization meets BBB standards. The Wise Giving Alliance Web site, www.give.org provides useful information for businesses looking to donate to a charity.

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