



BLOOMINGTON BUSINESSES THAT

We Support

Middle Way House

SHALOM CENTER

Boys and Girls

The Salvation Army

By **Jeremy Shere**

Photography by **Ben Weller**



Businesses exist to make money, right? After all, a company won't last long unless it makes a profit. But increasingly businesses are not just focused on making money; they also are intent on giving it away.

"Companies today have a greater awareness of corporate social responsibility," says Albert Lyons, associate director of the Certificate in Social Entrepreneurship Program (administered jointly by the IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs, the Kelley School of Business, and the Center on Philanthropy at IU). "More than ever, companies see giving back to the community not as something extra but as an integral part of their business plan."

The Bloomington business community is no exception. "Business leaders here are enlightened about the value of strengthening the community in which they, their families, and their employees and customers live," says Barry Lessow, executive director of United Way of Monroe County.

Businesses large and small do their part. The companies profiled on the following pages represent only a sampling of those that donate time and money to a wide range of causes and community organizations. When asked why they give back, business owners offer the same answer: because it's the right thing to do. And as much as Bloomington gains from their generosity, these businesspeople say they benefit even more, from living and working in a community brimming with life and the spirit of giving.





Ron Remak, general agent and owner.

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Bill C. Brown Associates

No business has a better understanding of the bottom line than a financial services company. For Bill C. Brown Associates, though, giving back is as important as being a leader in insurance, employee benefits, and financial planning.

“Most of us (at the company) were born and raised in Bloomington or have lived here for a long time, so we see firsthand the impact that you can make by donating time and money,” says Ron Remak, general agent and owner. “Who we are as an organization is much bigger than the volume of insurance and financial services products we sell; part of our mission statement is that we give back to the community.”

While the full range of organizations that benefit from BCB’s generosity is too long to catalog here, some of their most prominent local efforts include fielding two teams for Big Brothers/Big Sisters Bowl for Kids Sake, annually participating in building projects of Habitat for Humanity, sponsoring “All About Me” books donated to kindergartners, and donating money and supplies to Teachers Warehouse, an organization that offers free school supplies to students and teachers.

In addition to participating in community events, BCB employees are encouraged to

become more personally involved. Danell Witmer, BCB’s business and community development director, has for the past year been matched with a 5th grader through Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

“I take her to lunch once a week and do things with her at school,” Witmer says. “She’s an amazing girl and we’ve developed a wonderful relationship.”

Inspired by people whose contributions to the community typically go unrecognized, last year BCB initiated the “Unsung Hero” program. Each week the company receives outside nominations, then chooses and honors recipients with a certificate and a contribution to a charity of their choice.

“I’m attracted to people who work behind the scenes, without glory or the promise of a promotion or a bigger office,” Remak says. “They’re doing it for the right reasons, and we’re grateful for their work and for having the opportunity to honor their contributions. I’m proud of this agency for many reasons, but at the top of the list is the way our agents and staff give back to the community we all love.”

Marcus Reed, company founder.

Lotus Mortgage

Thanks to the subprime lending mess, it’s easy to see the mortgage business as an industry without a shred of fiscal or social conscience.

Bloomington’s Lotus Mortgage will change your view. The company plans to donate half of its annual net profits to a charity chosen by its clients. At the end of each fiscal year, Lotus profits will be tallied and clients will be asked to suggest a charity to receive the funds.

“It’s not purely altruistic; it’s good PR and good marketing,” says Marcus Reed, who founded the company in 2006. “But it’s also about quality of life. If I invest in charities and nonprofits, Bloomington becomes a stronger community and a better place to live.”

Reed’s commitment to community stems partly from knowing what it’s like to be without one. After attending IU in the early ’90s, he worked as a liquor salesman in Indianapolis, left the city life to live alone in the woods for six months, and then spent several years at sea



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delivering sailboats and serving in the Coast Guard. After marrying and having children, Reed returned to Bloomington in 2006 and took a job with a local mortgage company that has since ceased operations in Indiana.

Inspired by the company's policy of donating a third of its profits to charity, Reed saw an opportunity to not only make a decent living but to make a difference. "Capitalism is a great system, but it's only as good as the way it's practiced," he says. "A big corporation has all the rights of people with almost none of the corresponding responsibilities."

Reed started Lotus Mortgage as a way of practicing a more responsible form of capitalism. While customers are initially attracted by Lotus Mortgage's low rates, Reed says, they're really won over by the company's philanthropy.

"Saving customers money creates brain loyalty," he says, "but the fact that we give back creates heart loyalty."

Reed emphasized that, like any business owner, he wants his company to prosper and grow, but only on his own, socially conscious terms.

"I'd like Lotus Mortgage to be a successful business and be an example for others," he says. "I want to show that putting ethics first can be a good business model."



(from left) Firm administrator Angela Clark, partner Eric Slotegraaf, and associate Ben Niehoff.

Andrews, Harrell, Mann, Carmin & Parker PC

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When Eric Slotegraaf, a partner at the law firm of Andrews, Harrell, Mann, Carmin & Parker, got a call from a Bloomington couple who'd run into legal issues while trying to adopt a girl from Africa, he offered to take the case pro bono. Joined by associate Ben Niehoff and paralegal Elisa Pauley, Slotegraaf helped the couple navigate the adoption process and bring the child safely to Indiana. The couple was so moved by Slotegraaf's aid that they made a donation to the adoption agency in the law firm's name.

"That kind of made my year," Slotegraaf says. "It felt good to help someone, but I felt even better about the fact that when I went to Elisa and Ben, they immediately agreed to help even though they were already busy."

That sentiment—putting community service on par with doing business—pervades the firm. From pro bono work to serving on the boards of organizations such as the Red Cross and the SEED Corporation (an organization

that makes loans available to local start-up businesses) to supporting arts organizations including Bloomington Area Arts Council and Bloomington Pops, AHMCP encourages community involvement among its attorneys and staff.

"We're not here just to make a paycheck," Slotegraaf says. "We live in this community, we're part of it, and we want it to remain an exceptional place to live and work."

Firm administrator Angela Clark adds that AHMCP's employees care about Bloomington because they've chosen to live here. "Any of the attorneys and staff could go to a bigger city and make more money, but we're here because Bloomington provides the kind of culture and lifestyle we want," she says. "So it's in everyone's interest to give, volunteer, and contribute to what makes this place special."

"It's a cliché," Slotegraaf says, "but I really believe that you can't be successful unless you give back."



Cary Curry, owner and president.

“I believe in investing in the community because I’d be blind or egotistical if I didn’t see that without the support of this community I’d be nothing.”

Curry Buick Cadillac Pontiac GMC Truck, Inc.

Cary Curry, owner and president of Curry Buick, is a car salesman by profession. But he found his calling in the Student Ministry at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church, where he works with middle-school children. It was his position as a church elder, he says, that inspired him to adopt the biblical principle of tithing 10 percent of his company’s profits to charity.

“I teach the kids I work with that giving is important because when you give you receive a blessing,” says Curry, whose family has owned Curry Buick since 1915, making it one of the oldest car dealerships in the U.S. “Tithing is a good way for me to practice what I preach.”

Curry Buick has contributed to a wide range of causes, focusing especially on youth organizations such as Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington and the WonderLab science museum, as well as local arts organizations, including the IU Auditorium and Bloomington Pops.

“Arts make the community better,” says Curry, whose company recently won the Bloomington Greater Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year award in recognition of its commitment to service. “Diverse arts programming not only benefits people who live in Bloomington but also downtown businesses and restaurants—it makes the community healthier.”

Given the challenges facing the auto

industry, it might be tempting to cut back on tithing or to stop giving. But for Curry, that’s not an option.

“If I didn’t have the beliefs I have, it would be easy to be selfish, especially when times are tough,” he says. “But that doesn’t change our attitude. I believe in investing in the community because I’d be blind or egotistical if I didn’t see that without the support of this community I’d be nothing. It’s like I tell the kids in my ministry: Life is really about doing things for others and if you do what’s right, things will be okay.”

Monroe Bank

When Monroe Bank celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1992, employees celebrated by taking a day to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. Working together to build a house was so rewarding that management decided to make volunteering a formal part of the bank’s business plan. Seeking out other opportunities with the help of the local United Way Chapter, the bank established an annual “Day of Caring.” Every year, Monroe Bank branches close for half a day and give employees paid time off to work with local charitable and nonprofit organizations.

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Bank president and CEO Mark Bradford.



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bank president and CEO Mark Bradford. “At employee meetings I often say that if anything good is happening in the communities we serve, I want Monroe Bank to be involved in some way.”

The bank’s generosity isn’t limited to a single day of giving. Throughout the year, Monroe Bank donates money and employees donate time to organizations including Boy Scouts of America-Hoosier Trails, Community Health Access Program, Girls, Inc., Middle Way House, The Salvation Army, Shalom Center, and Stone Belt. Employee volunteer hours are tracked, and volunteers are honored at the end of the year for their contribution to the community.

Other community efforts include donating the bank’s main office as gallery space for local artists, hosting an annual Economic Forum, and offering the quarterly seminar series “Financial Choices for Women.”

Bradford is proud of the Bloomington business community’s commitment to giving back and encourages all companies to do even more. “Don’t wait until you have the perfect plan or unlimited financial resources,” he says. “We have very creative and innovative non-profits that are able to stretch a dollar in ways that you wouldn’t believe.” Businesses, he says, “will be amazed” at the impact these nonprofits have on the community.

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John West, F.C. Tucker/OBR owner and managing partner.

F.C. Tucker/OBR

Every year, F.C. Tucker/OBR Realtors sponsors “Dollar Day” at WonderLab.

“I go to the function and see that the kids are thrilled and sometimes overhear parents say that they’d never have the opportunity to bring their kids if not for the discount,” says John West, F.C. Tucker/OBR owner and managing broker. “Seeing that happen reminds me of why we do this.”

Like many local businesses, Tucker focuses its giving on children. Coming to Bloomington from Indianapolis, West didn’t expect to find anything like Indy’s sprawling Children’s Museum. But seeing potential in WonderLab when it was still a two-room operation tucked into a building on the downtown Square,

Tucker got involved by helping to support the new WonderLab facility on West 4th Street.

“It’s rewarding to see how the community really comes together to support a fun and educational place truly targeted for kids,” West says. “There aren’t many communities this size that have an interactive museum like we do.”

In addition to WonderLab, Tucker contributes time and money to a wide variety of organizations, including the Lotus Festival, Martha’s House (a homeless shelter), the Franklin Initiative (a local school-to-career program), Options for Better Living (an organization that aids people with disabilities), and Backstreet Missions. To raise money for the Boys & Girls Club, realtor associates donate a

percentage of their commissions, and the company matches their contributions. Employees also are encouraged to volunteer or serve on commissions and boards and to run for local office.

“It’s our philosophy that companies and the people they associate with need to pay their civic dues,” West says. “An important ingredient to a successful business is its ability to make social and civic contributions. It can’t be just about the bottom line.”

Although the housing market has slowed during the past year, Tucker remains committed to giving. “It’s all a matter of budgeting and planning,” West says. “We set aside what we can afford, stick to it, and do it.” ✨