The Edge: The power of giving back

Cindy Bishop
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Every time I’m at Orlando International Airport, I see them. Men and women greeting families, holding up signs saying “Give Kids The World.”

Curious, I researched what I saw on the sign. Henri Landwirth is a Belgian Holocaust survivor whose childhood was stolen from him in concentration camps. He started Give Kids The World to help children with life-threatening illnesses enjoy attractions in Central Florida — for free.

Landwirth came to the United States with the proverbial $20 in his pocket. He served in our military, then worked his way up in the hotel business in Cocoa Beach. At one Orlando hotel where he was part owner, a family had to cancel their reservation when their child died before the family got to Florida. Landwirth vowed to help families quickly come to Florida so their sick kids could enjoy a worry-free week. Today, Give Kids The World has transformed 135,000 children’s lives.

Others who give back to their community include Don and Denise Piercy and Chas and Vonnie Hoyman. Both couples have been recognized with numerous awards for their volunteer efforts in Brevard County.
Don and Denise Piercy, owners of The Running Zone, started the Running Zone Foundation in 1986 to promote health and fitness for all of us through running and walking events and education. It’s not uncommon for them to have several events going on every weekend.

Denise Piercy said: “For a business, it makes sense to give back. It’s the right thing to do. Instead of taking, we give back to make the community better.” Through the money they raise for different organizations and the lives they change, the Piercys make Brevard a healthier and better place.

Chas and Vonnie Hoyman are Eau Gallie High School sweethearts who want to give back to the community they enjoyed as children. Chas, a partner in the accounting firm Carr, Riggs & Ingram, and Vonnie, a retired teacher, are relentless volunteers. They both volunteer time with many organizations. For example, Chas is past chairman of the board for both the Economic Development Commission of Florida’s Space Coast and the United Way, (BG2) and Vonnie is an active volunteer leader at Junior League and Rolling Readers. “We grew up here,” Chas said. “This community did so much for us, we want to give back.”

Both The Hoymans and the Piercys have advice on how people and their businesses can change their communities. “Pick one organization you are interested in and get involved,” Chas said. “It will grow from there.” Denise echoed that sentiment. “Find an event or an organization that you are passionate about and join that quest.”

It’s positive PR for your business, good for others, and will make you feel like a rock star to give back.

As astronaut John Glenn said in the book “Gift of Life” about his friend Henri Landwirth: “Our lives are made better by reaching out to others. Henri Landwirth reaches out every day. He is making a difference at Give Kids The World. So can we.”

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