

# Outreach Enrichment

MEI takes extra steps to show employees the impact of its charitable giving.

by Victoria Pruitt

Giving back to the community is an important part of any business, but MEI Total Elevator Solutions in Mankato, Minnesota, has made it an integral part of its mission.

Founded in 1971, MEI donates at least 10% of its pretax profits internationally and domestically and has been donating to organizations for many years. “We believe in giving and helping without an agenda, expecting nothing in return,” John Romnes, CEO, said.



Romnes

In an effort to involve more of the company’s employees in its charitable giving, Romnes, along with MEI President Rick Lowenberg, started a new outreach and engagement program. Service opportunities called “Insight Trips” give the MEI team a chance to visit and help the organizations the company donates to in a direct and hands-on way.

Romnes and Lowenberg decided this idea was so important, it required a specific role for someone to head the project. Coralyn Musser was appointed to the position of director of outreach and engagement. Musser said:

*“We are creating a new option available to our employees to give them an opportunity to see firsthand what impact the dollars MEI gives locally and internationally is having. MEI’s vision is to host trips (multiple throughout the year) to visit these organizations in the field and allow our employees to see the work they are doing.”*

So far, the Insight Trips have taken employees to Kentucky and Guatemala, and future trips are planned for additional places. Others have visited Alice Lloyd College, which strives to provide affordable education without federal, state or local funding, and the Mayo Clinic, to learn about the human genome project.



MEI headquarters in Mankato, Minnesota



The streets of Guatemala, where MEI sent an employee to work with IJM



Bernadette Beckman works on building the back porch.

In Guatemala, Engineering Manager Nick Rehder spent time with the International Justice Mission (IJM) and saw firsthand the work it does to bring young children out of sex trafficking and slavery. He said that, as a father of two girls, the experience shook him to the core:

*“One of my days was spent with nearly 100 little girls who were court-ordered to be placed in a protection program due to their home circumstances. Several of the little girls had children of their own. One mother was just 10 years of age. As sad as this was, they were able to giggle, run and play like my own girls. At times, it was almost possible to forget the terrible situations they had been exposed to. The counselors, psychiatrists, lawyers and volunteers of IJM are doing everything in their power to repair the damage caused by years of sexual violence. To me, that is a powerful reason to be hopeful.”*

MEI will send another employee to Manila, Philippines, in the fall to work with IJM again.

*Continued*



(l-r) Coralyn Musser, Jim Barker, Beckman, Tom Weinberger, Jesse Tesdahl and Nick Rehder pose in front of the house they helped build in Kentucky.

Romnes believes MEI's new outreach program allows the company to live out its mission statement and values with actions. He believes the company has a purpose beyond elevators and says this is about what they can give, not what they can get. Romnes believes an important part of this is showing the employees where the money goes:

*"Employees play a huge part in the financial success of MEI, and since our giving is a direct result of our financial success, I feel it is important to know how and where we are giving financially to help make a difference in the lives of others outside of our company."*

In Kentucky, six employees were given the opportunity to work with the Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) to build a house and complete home

repairs. The family for whom CAP and the employees built the home had lost everything in a flood, after previously suffering the devastating effects of a fire. The family secured a loan for the land, and CAP provided the materials and labor. That's when MEI stepped in.

Rehder, who also went on the CAP trip, said:

*"It is difficult not to be touched by this experience. Here is a family that has been faced with a desperate situation, in an area that provides them with little opportunity to change their current circumstances. Nevertheless, they persevere, and they do so with a smile and a grateful heart."*

Each day of the trip began with a hearty breakfast and some time to reflect on the work they were doing and things to consider. The team worked on construction of



(l-r) Barker and Musser work together on bending fascia.



(l-r) Weinberger and Rehder



(l-r) Tesdahl and Weinberger pose with homeowner Christine Robinson.



Tesdahl does electrical work in the Kentucky home the group helped build.

the new home with the guidance of a CAP foreman.

Bernadette Beckman, product line manager, national sales, also went on the CAP trip and said it was unlike any other volunteer experience. “It truly embodied hope, faith and service to those in need,” she said.

Employees who go on these trips share their experiences and what they learned at companywide meetings. Participants will be selected based on a short application explaining why they wish to go on the trips.

Musser said the vision of the program “is to weave compassion and generosity deeply into the fabric of MEI, creating a culture of purpose where we regularly seek to meet the needs of others by learning, giving and doing.”

In addition to the Insight Trips, MEI is also discussing

the possibility of creating a “SWAT” team that would be ready to help with disaster relief locally or out of state. The company also rewards employees for individual charitable giving. MEI matches employee donations to charities and offers vacation days in exchange for eight or more hours of volunteer work.

Musser said:

*“The goal is to help communicate to all of MEI that what we are doing here goes far beyond building elevators. We are building a culture of purpose into the core of our business, and that starts by helping to educate people of what needs are out there locally, in the U.S. and globally. We are giving the employees an opportunity to get involved and do something about it.”* 🌐