

THE BIG GIVE

Landscapers across the country lend communities their time and talents.

BY **NICOLE WISNIEWSKI** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SURE, DISCOUNTS and add-ons can get customers in the door. But a growing number of clients aren't basing their purchasing decisions solely on service and price anymore. A business' social consciousness and community involvement also can turn customer heads.

Every day, more companies are watching their employees sign up early when the list goes up for blood donors, join teams to build Habitat homes, donate food and money to Harvest for Hunger or spend time as a Big Brother or Big Sister.


According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 61 million Americans — 26% of the adult population — give approximately 8.1 billion hours and \$158 billion worth of volunteer service annually.

In terms of employer-sponsored volunteer programs, 81% of companies use them to support core business functions, and nearly 50% incorporate volunteer programs into overall business plans.

Green Industry businesses also are contributing to this growth. Compared to last year, 1,000 more landscape and lawn care professionals donated time and service to the Professional Landcare Network's second annual Day of Service on April 22 — the 40th annual Earth Day. This amounted to more than 3,000 people in 38 states and Canada.

Webster's defines community as a group of people with a common background or shared interests within a society, and ser-

continued on page 10



CALCP President
Andy Ferguson
helps rehabilitate
Riverside Cemetery.



MirrorScapes' employees helped revive Cross Mound Park while a pair of YardApes workers (inset) spread mulch at a newly installed playground.

DAY of SERVICE

FIELD REPORT #1:

Cross Mound Park
Tarlton, OH

13

FIELD REPORT #2:

Riverside Cemetary
Denver, CO

16

FIELD REPORT #3:

Children's Playground
New Milford, CT

24

continued from page 8
 vice as providing that community with something it needs. As a gathering place for family and friends, industry experts agree landscapes are at the hearts of these communities.

So as an item in a landscaper's marketing agenda, professionals recommend properly planned community service as a low-cost way to improve employee attitude and retention, enhance goodwill, drive revenue and soothe the soul.

Beefing up the bottom line

Research shows there is a direct correlation between active community outreach programs and increased revenue and customer loyalty for businesses that engage in helping their communities.

To measure return-on-investment from community service events, start by maximizing priceless advertising opportunities. Sending press releases before the event and choosing a highly visible or important town project can draw press. A front-page story in the daily local paper is invaluable ... and possible. It's happened to Shayne Newman, president of New Milford, CT-based YardApes two years in a row after his company's Day of Service projects (and as a result of other volunteer

Framed through a climbing wall, YardApes' crew install pavers.

efforts his company supports).

And what visibility like that brings is clear: Clients.

Last year, Greener By Design chose a Day of Service project located in a market CEO Richard Heller wanted to expand into. He picked up 22 clients in that new market, and 11 of them mentioned hearing about the company from his Day of Service project.

Adequate promotion of the work before and after the event helped boost these numbers. Heller videotaped his project last year, edited it down and put it up on YouTube and the company's Facebook fan page. Greener By Design typically picks up two to three new fans a week with fresh content, such as videos of employees at work to tips on growing herbs or trends in eco-art to updates on local speaking engagements or gardening classes.

In addition to proper promotion and planning, volunteering can directly influence sales through improved employee attitudes.



According to the study "Good Companies, Better Employees," some of the outcomes of effective employee volunteer programs include:

- Increased job satisfaction levels.
- Increased positive word of mouth among employees about their employer and an improved rating among employees for their employer as a place to work.
- Higher employee retention rates.
- Employees who participated in volunteer programs appeared to be more prone to pursue promotion and development activities in the months following the participation in the

continued on page 12

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continued from page 10
volunteer programs.

The *Harvard Business Review* did a study of the linkage between employee attitude, customer relations and sales at Sears and found improving employee attitude by five points resulted in a 1.3-point improvement in customer satisfaction, which produced a 0.5% revenue hike. For a company like Sears, this amounts to \$65 million annually.

Do unto others ...

Heller admits he was a pretty shy kid growing up.

"I was a social moron," says the outgoing president of PLANET's Day of Service Committee. "It has taken years of my wife telling me to go and network for me to be comfortable speaking in public. She encouraged me not to talk about my business too much, but rather to take baby steps and be comfortable with each one. You can't



The world on their shoulders: Mirrorscapes' crew removes debris.

go straight from being shy to being a motor mouth."

What helped Heller get over the rough spots was having a passion for what he was doing, including the various customer service projects his company supports. "It's easier to talk about something if you really care about what you're doing and whom you're doing it for," he explains.

When choosing a volunteer effort, passion is the most important criteria.

"You have to be excited about what you're doing and feel good about helping someone who has a need," explains Newman, the incoming president of the PLANET Day of Service Committee. "If you are excited and have passion, everyone you interact with — whether it's your employees or vendors or the media — will feed off of your excitement."

And that's where one community service effort sets itself apart from another. Making a positive impact and growing employee and customer loyalty are all key drivers of volunteer efforts. But many Green Industry professionals who have had success here say none of this is possible by faking it. The primary rule of thumb: Believe in your project. "It's more than just trying to make a good impression for the sake of making a good impression," Newman says. "It's about simply doing good because it's the right thing to do." **LMI**



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X MARKS THE SPOT

Mirrorscapes refreshes the surroundings of mysterious — and beautiful — Cross Mound Park.

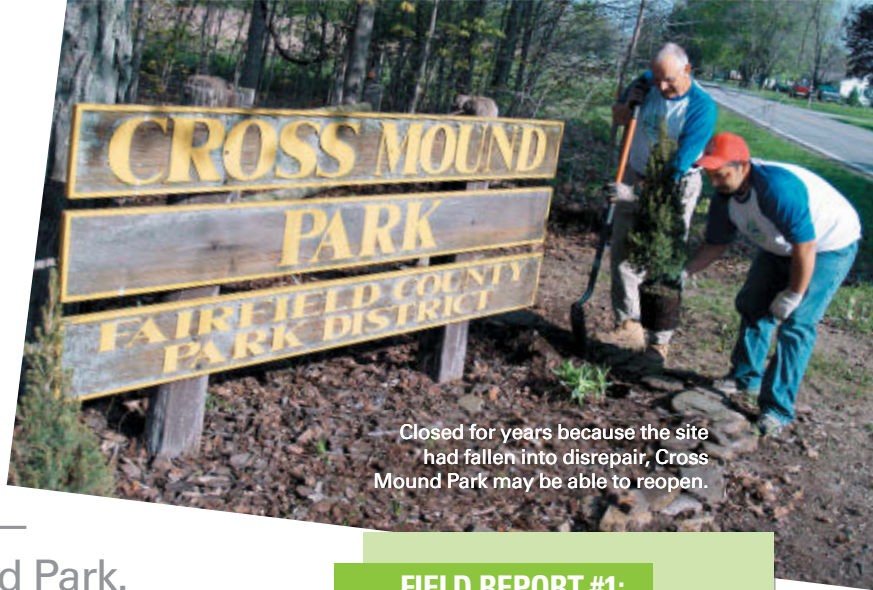
BY **RON HALL** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

NOBODY KNOWS the exact age of an ancient and mysterious Native American mound located at the summit of a wooded ridgeline in central Ohio. Most experts believe it was constructed about the time of the birth of Jesus. The X-shaped mound, whose circumference approximates the size of a Little League

infield, is the attraction at Cross Mound Park on the outskirts of the village of Tarlton (about 300 people), which is a 35-minute drive south of Columbus.

Chuck Miller selected Cross Mound Park as his company's PLANET Day of Service project. His company,

continued on page 14



Closed for years because the site had fallen into disrepair, Cross Mound Park may be able to reopen.

FIELD REPORT #1:

Cross Mound Park
Tarlton, OH

Day of Service Mission:

Mirrorscapes team members repaired a split rail fence and cleaned debris from the Cross Mound Park.

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continued from page 13

MirrorScapes LLC, proves you don't have to be a big landscape company or one that's been around a long time to do something nice for your region. Miller, 52, founded MirrorScapes in nearby Lancaster, OH, three years ago as he was winding down a 30-year-career as a high school educator — much of it spent teaching agriculture.

His company has four trucks and employs “seven or eight” employees, adding part-time help as needed for bigger projects. Miller's top challenge this spring has been reining in his firm's rapid growth, thanks to its “follow-up and customer service” and, more recently, to winning a prestigious award for its display landscape at the Tri-County Home Builders Home and Garden Show in March.

“We've been going like crazy. The phone's been ringing off the hook,” says



On the bridge to recovery: MirrorScapes' crew brings new life to Cross Mound Park.

Miller, obviously pleased as he and his six-man crew load two work trucks for the morning's work at the park. “We needed a break. The guys needed something different to do. They've been putting in a lot of hours.”

His young crew (including “plant man” Lennie Conrad, a retired high school guidance counselor/coach and

several years Miller's senior) approaches the Earth Day project with unfeigned enthusiasm, fueled probably as much by the prospect of a working picnic in the park — as evidenced by the boxes of goodies being loaded into the trucks — as by the cloudless, bracing April morning.

Driving three trucks to Cross Mound Park, and after digging into pastries and

PHOTO BY: RON HALL



SPRINTER

orange juice, the workers scatter about the 29-acre site. Several employees hike across the bridge spanning Salt Creek, built in 1936 as part of the Work Projects Administration (WPA) program, and up a woodland path to the ancient Cross Mound. There, they replace a section of broken split rail fence and clear it of seasons of broken tree limbs, rotting logs and an ankle-deep layer of brittle, dry oak leaves.

The freshly uncovered earthen mound clearly reveals its perfect X shape that, in spite of being surrounded by mature eastern woodlands, has — through some treatment or process known only to its builders — remained, to the bewilderment of many experts, vegetation-free for two millennia or more.

Elsewhere in the park, other employees focus on the park's entrance, where they weed, trim, plant ornaments and put down dark, fragrant mulch.

Amid the roaring and whirring of blowers, mowers and trimmers, David J. Fey, director/secretary of Fairfield County Parks, stops by mid-morning to thank Miller and his team. Fey is the sole employee of the park system. Age 65 and a retired teacher himself (biology), Fey is tasked with maintaining five covered bridges, several historical buildings, nature preserves and a sculpture garden as well as Cross Mound. Even after 11 years on the job, he approaches his duties with an unabashed interest and love for the county's rich cultural history. He also welcomes any help he can get for the cash-strapped park system.

Unfortunately, because of a lack of funds and ongoing vandalism at Cross Mound, Fey has had to keep the park entrance gate closed. (You can still hike to the mound if you park just outside the gate. There's room for one vehicle.)

Miller, whose Day of Service project

in 2009 was at the county's Lockville Park, is pleased to be of help and obviously enjoying his half-hour chat with Fey. Then, it's back to work for the both of them.

"I'm really enjoying this 'retirement,'" says Miller, taking a short break as noon approaches. "Every once in a while, an acquaintance from the school will call and ask what I'm doing and I'll say, 'I'm outside and enjoying it.' And, yes, I work with the crews and then I come home and do the paperwork."

Miller says he has no plans for a second retirement, and he wants to continue to grow his landscape company as circumstances allow.

But we had to know: What exactly was the inspiration behind the company name, Mirrorscapes?

"It's our tag line. Your lawn is a reflection of you," says Miller with a broad smile. **LM**

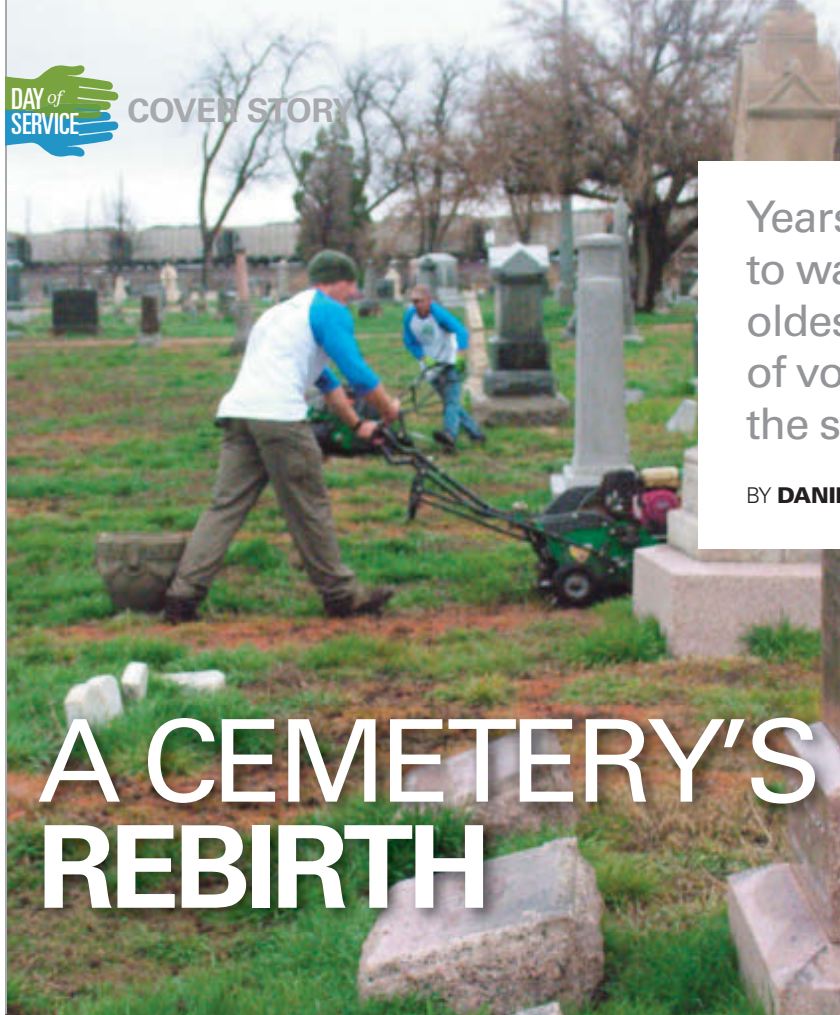


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A CEMETERY'S REBIRTH

Years after losing the ability to water one of Denver's oldest cemeteries, a group of volunteers works to revive the site with native species.

BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS** MANAGING EDITOR

PATRICIA CARMODY steers her white Subaru Outback wagon along the bumpy dirt and gravel road that winds its way through the 77-acre Riverside Cemetery, Denver's oldest operating cemetery. She muses about her desire to find a scout troop in search of a community service project, and a benefactor willing to donate some gravel to repair the many potholes dotting the road, now oozing with mud following the morning's cold shower. But the sun has

continued on page 18

PHOTO BY: DANIEL G. JACOBS



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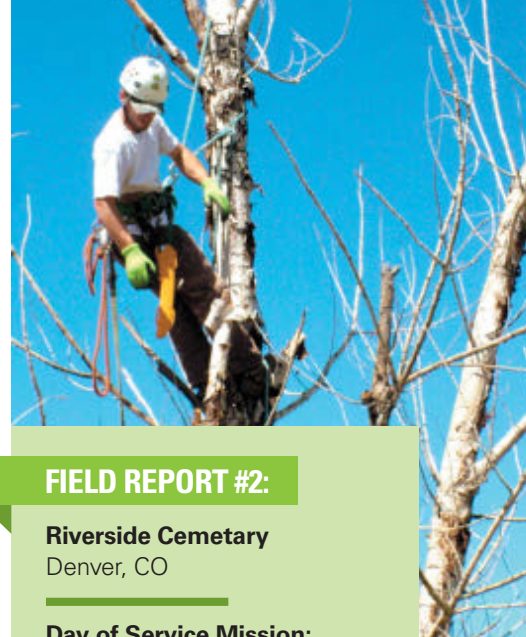
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continued from page 16
since come out, and wispy clouds waft through a blue sky over the cemetery — through which volunteers scurry about, working on a number of projects as part of PLANET's second annual Day of Service.

Carmody passes a small raised

planter and stops both the car and her conversation. She catches her breath slightly as she sees the work some of the volunteers completed earlier. Within a few hours, the planter went from weed-filled to tilled bed to beautiful display of native and specially selected flowers, all to please visitors coming to honor the



FIELD REPORT #2:

Riverside Cemetery
Denver, CO

Day of Service Mission:

The Riverside Cemetery lost watering rights which left a number of plants and trees dead.

67,000 friends and loved ones buried in the 134-year-old cemetery.

“Look at that,” says Carmody, executive director of the Fairmount Heritage Foundation, which oversees the cemetery. Still wearing the plastic-garbage-bag-turned-rain-poncho, Carmody stares in awe at the transformed planter. “I am so grateful. It’s the revival of Riverside.”

Dozens of volunteers come courtesy of the Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals (CALCP) to prep and plant 2 acres of groundcover; install a variety of native trees, plants, and shrubs; plant a heritage iris garden; and remove a number of dead heritage trees — including an approximately 80-year-old American elm.

Though it will take years to complete, the goal is to make the cemetery sustainable. The only watering done will be until the plants are established.

CALCP committed to reviving the cemetery, which fell into disrepair after the organization overseeing the site lost a long court battle that went to the Supreme Court over water rights.

“This is one of my favorite days of the year,” says Andy Ferguson, president of CALCP and the district manager of the West Denver office of The Davey Tree Expert Co. “Our members show up in force.”

continued on page 20

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continued from page 18

Providing labor and equipment for half a day means those workers, machines and vehicles aren't doing work the company can bill for. But that's not really the point.

"It's a great way for us to make a big impact without impacting our ability to make some money," Ferguson says.

Companies from across the state and across the country participated in a variety of projects.

"We found out about Day of Service two years ago," says Bryan Gooch, marketing manager for Agrium Advanced Technology. "We jumped on the opportunity to be a lead sponsor. It is perfectly aligned with what we believe in. We saw Day of Service as not only a chance to give back to the communities that we live in, but also to donate products to people who can help extend the message, and let them use products



Workers install native plants at Riverside Cemetery. Lifescape Associates Troy Shimp and Michael Hupf (inset) create a healing garden at the Denver Children's Advocacy Center.

that are good for the environment."

Loveland, CO-based Agrium volunteers worked on their own project near the company's new headquarters (transplanting native plant seedlings to help restore wetlands and natural areas) and donated fertilizer to several more.

Planting the seeds for healing

While CALCP members toiled away at the Riverside Cemetery, about 20 min-

utes away Troy Shimp, senior designer for Denver-based Lifescape Associates, and his team started working on a healing garden between two buildings that house the Denver Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC). Though the rain only slowed the crew at Riverside Cemetery, it put a halt to the day's work at the DCAC. But that only meant the crew would be back at the next opportunity.

"We see giving back to the commu-

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nity as very important,” says Michael Hupf, CEO of Lifescape Associates. “For us, it creates a huge sense of teamwork.”

In all, about 15 workers will install scores of plants, trees and shrubs — along with a flagstone patio to create a seating area.

“The addition of the Children’s Healing Garden ... will make our facilities more beautiful and provide a better experience for the children and families we serve,” says Dr. Gizane Indart, executive director of the DCAC. **LM**

RIVERSIDE CEMETERY PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

A number of organizations from CALCP and a few other organizations volunteered their time and effort to the Riverside Cemetery Revival project as part of PLANET’s Day of Service on Earth Day 2010:

Agrium Advanced Technologies
Alpha One Inc.
Arkansas Valley Seed
Barr Lake Nature Center
Colorado Forest Service
Colorado State University
Colorado State University Master Gardeners
Colorado Tree Coalition
Davey Tree Expert Co.
Denver Botanic Gardens
Denver Rose Society
Fertek Co.
Front Range Community College
Green Mountain Lawn Service
Helena Chemical Co.
International Society of Arboriculture
Iris Colorado
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WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND



YardApes' Owner Shayne Newman chats with Parks & Rec committee members and the New Milford mayor.

YardApes' Shayne Newman is a big believer in good karma, and that's why his investment in community service marketing has yielded great return — in more ways than one.

BY **NICOLE WISNIEWSKI** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SOME PEOPLE think Shayne Newman is a mastermind when planning community service and gaining recognition for his New Milford, CT-based company, YardApes.

"They think I know it all when it comes to these events," says the incoming president of the Professional Landcare Network Day of Service Committee. On a recent PLANET Webinar on the topic, moderator and industry consultant Jeffrey Scott even called Newman a

continued on page 24

PHOTO BY: NICOLE WISNIEWSKI

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continued from page 22
community service “rock star.”

What’s his *real* trick? “I just get lucky,” says Newman, crossing his arms over his chest and shrugging his shoulders. He squints in the sun at his team of 12 working in khakis and blue, white and green PLANET Day of Service shirts at a town playground on April 22. It’s a cloudless,



Spread the love: YardApes’ crewmembers shovel topsoil and plant turf seed.

FIELD REPORT #3:

Children’s Playground
New Milford, CT

Day of Service Mission:

YardApes donated their time and energy to move 60 yards of topsoil, plant turf and install a paver patio at a children’s park in Connecticut.

70-degree day. One couldn’t ask for a better morning to move mulch and 60 yards of topsoil, plant turf seed and install a paver patio walkway in a children’s park that needs some attention.

On this Earth Day, Newman donates services worth \$7,000 to the community park. And where this “luck” is concerned, Newman is on a winning streak.

Instant karma

Five years ago, when he held his first community golf fundraiser, Newman raised \$10,000 for his charity and maxed out at 120 golfers. Last year, on his first PLANET Day of Service, Newman’s event was featured on the front page of the local garden club’s newsletter — as well as the local daily newspaper. This year, because the playground is a hot-button issue in the town, reporters showed up again.

Also in attendance is New Milford Mayor Patricia Murphy, as well as Dan Calhoun and Eleanor Covelli — the director and assistant director of the Parks & Recreation Department, respectively. As this trio and several members of the media survey the project while the crew works, Newman talks to them with ease about the park

continued on page 27

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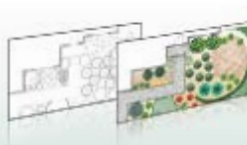
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COVER STORY



Laying the groundwork: Workers meticulously lay the paver pattern, above, and a crewmember's son, right, enjoys the playground after the hard work is done.

continued from page 24

maintenance, as well as other projects that need assistance. It's certainly not bad company to keep when you're a landscape contractor.

"Yeah, that was pretty cool that the mayor showed up," Newman says, nonchalantly.

There's one theory Newman uses to explain this good fortune. Deep pockets? No. Political agenda? No. Ingenious planning? A little. Right place, right time? Maybe. However, Newman says he can sum it up with just one word: Karma.

"I believe that if I do good things then good things will come back to me," he says. "It might not be today or tomorrow, but somewhere down the line it will pay off."

That's when you see it. The immense pride. Newman swells with it as he watches his crew in action while juggling reporters' questions and mingling with the mayor.

"We are working on two projects today, and 15 of my 17 guys volunteered to help — unpaid," he says, beaming.

This fact you wouldn't know off-hand. The crew is as focused as usual. Crewmembers Ramiro Parra and Franklin Guaman, who were installing the paver patio walkway, are meticulous in their laying of the pattern — a design that duly impressed the mayor. Just a normal day's work? Hardly.

"My wife and kids come here all the time, and people in town will know we did this. It has to be perfect," Parra



says to Newman.

And it is — down to the last brick engraved with a special message: "Walkway Donated by YardApes Landscaping."

Though Newman hasn't crunched the numbers on exactly the type of return-on-investment this community service event will provide, he knows there is value he can't compute. After all, how much could you pay for the front page of the local daily paper? What price can you put on more than an hour of undivided attention from the city mayor? What about employee excitement and pride? Or the number of current and potential clients who say they saw what YardApes did for the community?

"I'm a numbers person, and I can get really into the processes," Newman admits, taking a bite of the pizza he provided his crew for lunch. "But I try not to get too wrapped up in numbers during Day of Service.

"It would take away from the good feeling I get just by giving back," Newman says, "and that is bigger for me than anything I could get back monetarily." LM

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