

A good habit

Knowing there's always someone in need has driven a Florida company to participate in an array of service efforts. BY CASEY PAYTON

Katy Harrell, vice president of Southeastern Outdoor Management, believes you don't have to look far to find someone in greater need than yourself. That's why the Panama City, Fla.-based firm makes a habit of volunteering.

One of Southeastern's primary efforts is Habitat for

Humanity. Building a home for a family is the type of project where you get a "direct and immediate sense of reward," Harrell says. "You don't always have the opportunity to see the final result and the impact that your time and service make, but with Habitat for Humanity, you do. It's incredibly gratifying."

Of the many service opportunities Southeastern has been part of, Harrell says the design and installation of a memorial at Surfside Middle School was among the most rewarding. Harrell's mother, the school principal, asked Southeastern to design a courtyard that would celebrate the life of Mary Lynn May, a teacher who lost her battle with cancer. Soon, the plan for the Mary Lynn May Memorial Courtyard was launched. The design included paver step stones, a fountain, plants and benches. And the teachers and students themselves raised the funds to buy the fountain and benches.

"We organized a work day with volunteers and staff to install the courtyard," says

Harrell. "We saw it from concept to completion and were honored to use our talents and resources for such an amazing cause."

In today's day and age, Harrell says she knows many companies are operating with less—less equipment, less manpower and often less revenue.

That reality may make some choose to forego community service work. But there's always a way, she says.

"If you're short on time, then pick a project you can get your spouse and kids involved in so you're not taking away from family time by

doing volunteer work in your free time," she suggests. "Or, if you're a small company, pick a small project. There's always a way you can help."

Southeastern's intent is never to perform stewardship to receive recognition, but rather for the personal satisfaction of knowing it gave to others who are less fortunate, Harrell says. However, the company's discovered that people do take notice, and it can drive new business.

"Twice we've actually received landscape jobs for a new business or residence because one of the organizers had seen us participating in service projects and felt they wanted to do business with a company that was community-service minded," she says. "Most importantly, recognize that whatever you choose doesn't have to be a long-term time or monetary commitment to make a big impact," she says. LM

AT A GLANCE

Company: Southeastern Outdoor Management
Headquarters: Panama City, Fla.
President: David Chapman
Vice President: Katy Harrell

SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Habitat for Humanity**—provides landscape construction drawings, materials, labor and equipment. In 2011-2012 alone, provided resources for three projects and donated plant materials to be sold to raise money for building materials.

▶ **Surfside Middle School**—designed and installed the Mary Lynn May Memorial Courtyard; also provided equipment and labor for football field aeration and school ground plant installation and irrigation services.

▶ **Bay County, Fla., Middle and High Schools**—provides equipment, labor and plant materials for ball field clean-ups.

▶ **R. L. Turner baseball program**—provides equipment, labor and plant materials for ball field clean-ups.



Three Southeastern staff members pitch in at one of the firm's Habitat for Humanity projects last fall.

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