

Umpqua Bank Sees Big Benefits in Volunteering

by K_Guice

Company Pays Employees to Take Time Off, Connect to Community - Margaret Mead may have said it best, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." That is a philosophy that one business around Bend stands by.

Umpqua Bank, a subsidiary of Umpqua Holdings Corporation encourages their employees to reach out to their communities through the Connect Volunteer Network.

Umpqua Bank associates volunteer at the Central Oregon Junior High District Track Meet in May of this year. (L to R) Arden Dettwyler, Mike Donaca (Background) Dani HensleyThe program is an industry leading, employer-paid volunteer program that promotes a strong commitment to youth and education as well as community development in Oregon, Washington and Northern California.

"We really feel like it's something that connects us strongly to our community," said Nicole Vanderstoep, who oversees creative strategies for Umpqua Bank. "It's really important to know what is happening in the communities we're in and our employees are really are best way of doing that."

The Connect Volunteer Network provides full-time Umpqua Bank associates with 40 hours of paid time off per year to volunteer at youth-focused organizations, schools and community development programs, which often have a hard time filling their daytime volunteer positions.

During 2005, 728 Umpqua associates donated 11,573 volunteer hours to youth and education-focused programs. Additionally, the program saw a 65 percent increase in associate participation and a 78 percent increase in hours donated, compared to 2004.

Combined, Umpqua associates in Washington, Oregon and Northern California have impacted more than 250 organizations and schools since the program's inception in 2004. Vanderstoep said the company sees it as part of its benefits package and a lot of the employees agree. Kristee Chick, a commercial banking manager said it swayed her decision to take a job with Umpqua last May.

“I learned about it in my interview process,” she says. “It was one of the things that excited me about working with this company.”

Chick said it’s considered a very large part of the program truly is a benefit. “I’m able to plug into the community and give back to the community. It’s just huge.”

Other employees agree. “We get fantastic feedback,” Vanderstoep said. “We receive thank you letters from associates saying this program gives them the opportunity to be a child again, explore a passion and teach others.”

The numbers show that to be true. In April, Umpqua Bank polled employees to determine the impact of volunteerism. The results showed that the Connect Volunteer Network enhanced employee loyalty, increased morale, encouraged a greater sense of satisfaction with employees' current work environment and encouraged volunteerism in general.

Umpqua Bank, Century Drive Store For example, 95 percent of the bank's associates viewed the program as a benefit of working at Umpqua. Eighty six percent felt a greater sense of satisfaction with their current work environment. Last but not least, 25 percent of employees who'd never volunteered began with the program.

According to Vanderstoep, many of the employees go beyond the 40 hours they are paid to volunteer each year. "We are really focused on getting people out during the workday, but so many are still getting out there during the weeknights and the weekends helping in the community," she added.

"I see it as being contagious," Chick said. "There are personal benefits as you give to the

community.” Personally, she gives more time than is allotted by the company, but says it is great to be acknowledged by the company you are working for.

“Umpqua really recognizes the value of their employees volunteering in the community and giving back,” Chick said. “You are building a sense of community.”

With the population of Bend growing by leaps and bounds, more help is needed. “I’ve been in Bend since ’81,” she said. “There is an ever-growing need. The more people we have the more services we need and the more volunteers are necessary to make those programs work.”

It is that kind of passion and devotion from employees that makes this program so successful. “It really

helps that they are able to drive their own experience, Vanderstoep said. We donâ€™t direct. We offer them the opportunity and they really own it from there. They are able to engage at their level, but no one is required.â€•

Chick doesnâ€™t think it should have to be required. She says anyone can do it; they just need to start small. â€œYou can start out with a limited amount of time, a limited commitment in a venue like a local reading program,â€• she advises. â€œThat is a really huge assistance for our school as well.â€•

After all, whether a work place promotes volunteerism or not, it really comes down to people helping one another, especially children. Chick said, â€œWe can only improve our community by helping kids and giving them the opportunity to be successful and in turn we create future community leaders.â€•

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