

Putting Avnet's Money Where Its Mouth Is

Dollars for Doers rolls out across Americas

by Valliere Jones, contributing writer

Although Avnet has long encouraged employees to become involved in their communities, it is putting more muscle behind it by making cash donations to the organizations where employees volunteer.

The Avnet Cares Governing Board recently expanded its Dollars for Doers pilot program across the Americas, pledging to donate cash grants to qualified nonprofit organizations based on the level of employee involvement. Employees volunteering 20 hours before Sept. 30 may apply for organizations to receive \$200, and organizations where employees volunteer 40 hours before Sept. 30 may receive \$400.

"Avnet has a strong history of exemplary corporate citizenship, and Dollars for Doers demonstrates its commitment to support employees in their efforts to help the nonprofits that are important to them," says Priscilla Kadi, director of product segment materials operations at Avnet Technology Solutions (TS) and president of the Avnet Cares Governing Board. "The program also encourages them to volunteer during a time when these organizations need it most because of declining donations."

More than 40 employees participated in the initial Dollars for Doers pilot, which ran simultaneously in Phoenix and Peabody, Mass., last year. Avnet distributed more than \$16,000 to a wide variety of organizations, including Phoenix Children's Hospital, where Shirley Staten, director of Avnet Express at Avnet Electronics Marketing, Americas, and president of Avnet Cares Arizona, volunteers for three hours every Sunday morning.

"I assist in the family living center, a place where families can relax while their children receive treatments, to help keep things orderly," she says. "I also spend time in the intensive care unit and on other floors – holding and feeding infants or playing games and doing crafts with children while their families are getting some food and rest."

Shirley, who personally purchased a microwave for the family living center when the old one broke, was happy to learn Avnet would support her efforts to make a difference at Phoenix Children's Hospital.

"To have company resources behind us is another thing that makes employees want to work here," she says. "It didn't influence me to volunteer more often, but I knew there was a need for the funds, and it inspired me to ask other companies to donate items I know are needed."

Meanwhile, Denise Mielke, Avnet Express manager in Peabody, had been volunteering for two years at Lowell Wish Project, an organization that helps provide homeless families staying in shelters and hotels with school supplies, clothing, furniture, appliances and other household items. Because Lowell Wish Project lost a \$75,000 grant and was struggling to meet the high demand for items, she was thrilled to learn Avnet would honor her work with a contribution.

"I was excited and relieved – in this economy, every dollar matters," she says. "I have always believed in Avnet, but the program reaffirms my faith in the human aspect of our company."

Besides applying for a Dollars for Doers grant again this year, Denise is enlisting support from her coworkers by organizing a spring cleaning effort to round up additional items needed.

In addition to individual applications, Dollars for Doers offers a team application through which five or more coworkers can collectively volunteer the hours needed to apply for a Dollars for Doers donation. Moreover, whether part of a team or on their own, employees are able to apply for donations to two different organizations.

"By allowing employees who don't have 20 hours to volunteer to combine their time with others, Dollars for Doers supports the spirit of teamwork outside the office which, in turn, encourages more employees to become involved in their communities," says Priscilla.

Best of all, Dollars for Doers is a small pilot program that gets Avnet triple bang for its buck in a time when it may have to cut back on its other philanthropic investments. "The program helps improve employee morale by allowing employees to engage in their communities and expose the Avnet brand all during a time when local nonprofits are struggling due to a reduction in volunteers and cash donations. Dollars for Doers helps fulfill Avnet's commitment as a role model of corporate citizenship and employee engagement – all good for the business," Priscilla says.