

Community News

SW Cooper City

December 1, 2017

Employees follow company's lead in volunteering

By **MARCIA HEROUX POUNDS**
Staff writer

From wearing pink socks to support breast cancer research to taking time off work to volunteer, South Floridians are joining with their employers in supporting charitable causes.

Some companies focus on certain community organizations or causes and organize companywide annual events, while others let employees volunteer or raise funds for whatever philanthropic groups they support.

Fort Lauderdale-based AutoNation annually holds its Drive Pink America campaign to battle breast cancer, this year raising more than \$11 million for cancer research. On the auto retailer's annual Day of Caring, workers visit hospitals to give out 5,000 gift bags to cheer patients. The bags contain a water bottle, blanket and slipper-socks, adult or children's coloring books and pencils, lemon drops for adults and gummies for kids.

Why does AutoNation spend time supporting cancer research and patients?

"Everybody knows somebody who has been stricken with cancer. The stories we hear from our associates are just incredible. This is a way that everybody has been touched," said Marc Cannon, chief marketing officer, who sports pink shorts on the Day of Caring, which took place on Oct. 11.

He said 70 percent of AutoNation employees participate, including those in the auto retailer's headquarters and retail stores. "It's all part of our culture," Cannon said.

At NCCI in Boca Raton, the workers' compensation data company, employees are given 48 hours each year to help in the community.

Eight of those hours go to the companywide volunteer day, when employees showed their support for nonprofits including Boca Helping Hands, Habitat for Humanity of Palm Beach County, Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County, Peter Blum Family YMCA of Boca Raton, [Place of Hope](#), Sea Angels and SOS Children's Villages.

More than 300 employees participated on Oct. 13 in the company-wide volunteer day. Workers were given the usual day's pay to go out in groups and volunteer for various community projects. Another 40 hours are used at the



NCCI/COURTESY

Back row: Habitat for Humanity Construction Crew Leader Guido Dominic and NCCI employee Irving Estevez; Front row: NCCI employees Monica Cardona-Matthews, Christina Ponton, Annabel Cohen and Roguens Loriston take part in the company's Volunteer Day in October.

employee's discretion to volunteer for causes that matter to them, the company said.

Miramar-based Tropical Financial Credit Union's 180 South Florida employees choose their own causes for giving. Each department works to vet and then pick an opportunity, which can be different from year to year.

"I want the employees to know the credit union is behind whatever their cause is," CEO Richard Helber said. That philosophy gets more people involved, he said.

Workers have installed fire alarms in people's homes for the Red Cross, taken part in Relay for Life teams, helped a police officer serve food to kids at Ronald McDonald House, and gathered gifts for children at Christmas.

Tropical Financial's workers also are given an extra incentive to participate — for every event they participate in, they earn points

toward defraying their own costs for health care premiums.

American Express in Sunrise lets workers choose from nonprofit organizations to make a donation during its "Give2Gether" campaign in October. The company matches the contributions dollar for dollar.

South Florida-based organizations that have been recipients of the program include Family Central, Urban League of Broward County and SOS Children's Villages.

American Express employees also give of their time, with more than 100 employees coming together to pack hygiene care kits to be distributed in disaster areas by nonprofit World Vision. The team prepared 750 kits ready for shipment to those in need.

Company volunteers also packed 13,900 pounds of food with Feeding South Florida. And

through its partnership with Bright Horizons Foundation for Children, American Express employees packaged pajamas and a small teddy bear for homeless children ages 2 to 12 who are living in local shelters.

For JM Family Enterprises in Deerfield Beach, giving happens both in the community and at home.

The company provides one full work day or two half days to workers who want to volunteer with a non-profit, educational or religious organization.

JM Family employees also take care of each other through the company's "Associates Helping Associates" program, which provides financial assistance due to a loss of a home in a man-made or natural disaster, or loss of life within the immediate family. After an initial contribution of \$25,000 from JM Family, the assistance is

funded through employees.

The fund recently provided more than \$200,000 to employees and their family members affected by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, JM Family said.

In Plantation, law firm Kelley Kronenberg collects donations every July and August throughout its Florida offices for military care packages to send to active troops.

The firm partners with Forgotten Soldiers Outreach, a non-profit organization headquartered in Lake Worth, which ships care packages to registered soldiers every month. Collected items include travel-sized toiletries, non-perishable food, and games.

"These brave soldiers put their lives on the line for us every day. It is the least we can do to repay them for all they do for us," said Heath Eskalyo, principal partner and chief financial officer for Kelley Kronenberg.