



by Vera Haskins
President of Spirit® Petroleum

Spirit® Licensees: Doing Well in Business Doing Good in Their Communities

Some days, it seems that the only news from the business world is bad. Banner headlines flash stories of corporate mismanagement and misbehavior, while reports to the contrary appear on the back page or not at all. Barraged with negative news, folks on the consumer side of the equation tend to get jaded, viewing all business owners and managers as greedy and driven only by self-interest.

In an effort to balance things a bit, I'm going to tell you today about some members of our Spirit® family who roundly disprove the notion that business success equates lack of concern for others. In fact, the owners of these three companies have made a priority of getting involved and giving back to their communities. And, rest assured, they are not the only ones. Generosity and a commitment to community seem to be a trait widely shared among our Spirit® licensees — one that I'm proud to highlight here.

Cities and towns in the central Washington state areas served by Connell Oil are a support focus for that company and its employees. "Helping out our customers and our community is very important to me personally," Connell Oil's President Brad Bell told me. "We like to give to worthy causes and follow the lead of our employees and our customers in determining who to partner with." For example, one of Connell Oil's managers was very involved with the Alzheimer's Association, and the company assists with fundraising and event organizing for them. Connell Oil also participates in Relay For Life, Junior Achievement, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Rotary International, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Boys & Girls Club, Future Farmers of America and Chambers of Commerce in all the communities it serves. And the company sponsors an annual Kidz Digz Rigz event benefitting the local medical center.

"We also get involved in many local schools," Bell said. "We donate money, advertise in their newspapers, support their sports teams and sponsor them in various ways. It's always good to support the kids of our customers and strengthen our community ties."

David Adcox, president of Highland Corporation based in Hohenwald, Tennessee, described a different approach to giving. "Seven years ago, we formed our own charitable foundation," he told me. "We thought this approach would give us more flexibility to help individuals in need and smaller charities that aren't well funded. If we hear of a family that's experienced a devastat-

ing illness or loss, such as a fire, we can be proactive with help." Highland Corporation's employees help fund the foundation with a voluntary payroll deduction that Adcox matches; additional funds come from an annual golf tournament. "We also ask each of our convenience stores to nominate a charity from their communities; those local organizations range from shelters for women and children to food banks," he said.

After many years of partnering with the Alzheimer's Association, the owners of St. Romain Oil in Mansura, Louisiana have created a structured philanthropic effort tailored to reflect the company's mission and values. It's called Corporate Works of Mercy, and it is inspired by the biblical directive to perform corporal works of mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the needy and visiting the sick. The program calls for partnering each quarter with an organization devoted to aiding the needy in the local community. St. Romain Oil also directs its sales force to help school administrators develop sponsorship programs with schools in the local communities it serves.

"I think that my parents and grandparents believed in leaving us a legacy of generosity and stewardship as a core value, of giving back by lending a helping hand, not just offering a handout," said Annie Gauthier, company controller and granddaughter of St. Romain Oil's founder. "The organizations we're working with this year are all nonprofits devoted to helping people break a bad cycle — of poverty, of victimization, of illness or isolation — and to change things for themselves and their children."

Company President Todd St. Romain added, "Our structured approach allows our company to choose local charities that serve the immediate needs of the communities where we do business in an impactful manner, as well as targeting all local schools for their support needs while still being involved with the Alzheimer's Association."

"We're glad to send a message that counteracts the growing trend of regarding all business as greedy, even evil," Gauthier said. "We want St. Romain Oil to help demonstrate that businesses, even small family businesses like ours, can be good corporate citizens devoted to their local communities."

I couldn't have said it better. It's an honor for all of us at Spirit® to work with these people, to help them succeed and to support them in their efforts to help their communities — which, in the long run, benefit us all.