



Local News

Midland company discovers the joy of 'paying it forward'

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by Midland Daily News

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We had our annual holiday lunch the other day at work. As usual, it was fun, as **Allis Information Management** (AIM) is a collegial place. We enjoy social time together, we enjoy parties and we enjoy food!

But this one was really special. The managers this year decided that in lieu of a series of small gifts for us, they would give us each \$50 and encourage us to use it to help someone else during these challenging economic times. Those who wished were invited to share what they did with the money at the holiday lunch.

When sharing time came, I think none of us quite expected the intense enthusiasm for this project and the variety of ways we found to "pay it forward."

The first person to tell what she did with the money set the bar high for the rest of us. She said she wanted to do something for children, cancer patients, pets and wanted to give to some organization that feeds the hungry. As she thought about it further, she also decided to give to a charity that helps soldiers or their families.

She combined the first two passions by giving to St. Jude's Hospital, in memory of a family friend who died of cancer this year. She gave to a pet charity promoted by Soldan's Feed & Pet Supplies, and she gave \$5 to a Kroger effort in which a \$5 donation is turned into \$70 worth of food for the needy.

This colleague -- she didn't want her name used for this article -- ended up matching the \$50 with \$50 of her own. And she said it made this holiday season special.

"I think it really shows what this season is about," she said. "It kept me focused on the good things."

Others also decided to split their funds between charities -- I chose the Salvation Army's "Toys for Kids" program and my church's food pantry.

Some stories involved giving to friends. One person shared that she gave the money to a family friend who was recently laid off work. Another said she paid for a week of childcare for a friend who recently moved to another state and is temporarily living in a shelter.

Janice Reinke of Sanford said AIM's \$50 "was the best gift I ever received ... I get the most joy out of making other people happy." After agonizing over how to use the money, she ended up matching the gift and assisting a counselor who "helped my family through a really difficult time this year."

Deb Tworek of Mount Pleasant used the money to buy toys for the "Toys for Tots" program, because when she was growing up, "my family didn't have a lot of money" and she rarely received toys.

Phil Ewbank of Midland chose to multiply his gift by giving to the Community Assistance Program at First United Methodist Church. The program networks with social services in the city and county to

help those with crisis needs.

About the \$50 donation project, he said, "The thing I liked about it was that it doesn't take a lot of money to make a difference. If you get a lot of people moving in that direction, you can make an impact."

Another colleague who describes herself as a "behind-the-scenes" kind of person said she had been thinking and praying about what to do when her daughter -- a high school freshman -- was deeply moved when she heard about abused women and the work of Shelterhouse.

Not only did this colleague use her \$50 to buy clothing, personal items and toys for the organization, but members of her daughter's basketball team got involved and took a large load of items to Shelterhouse.

"The thing that so moved me is ... I just think it's so neat that AIM entrusted us with money to give wherever we thought we needed to send it," she said.

"I was really touched by how seriously people took this," said AIM President Sue LaBonville. "Almost everyone matched the donation with their own money -- some people many times over and often they asked to remain anonymous! Everyone put a lot of thought and creativity into their choices; as a result we touched more lives than Sandy, Anne and I ever dreamed!"

Sandy Warner and Anne Herron are AIM's vice presidents.

Other companies do similar things, I'm sure -- AIM got the idea from United Way. But for us at Allis Information Management, this Christmas is a little more special because we were given an extra chance to embrace the spirit of giving.

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