

Never Too Busy

Three area businesses make time for good deeds that don't go unnoticed

SURE, THE PURPOSE OF BUSINESS IS TO MAKE A PROFIT.

Without a profit, companies go bankrupt, customers lose vital services and employees lose their jobs. But businesses and their owners aren't limited to selling their product and reaping a profit; many go a step further to simply do the right thing, for themselves, their employees, and in many cases, their community. And often, the right thing turns its own profit, both monetary and otherwise.

Three businesses are doing just that and because of their work, they were the 2006 recipients of the Good Samaritan Award. The **Samaritan Counseling Center of Southern Wisconsin** (2165 Linden Ave.) and **Edgewood College** created the award in 2005 to recognize low-profile local businesses for taking the time to help people in need.

Cher Peng Her and **Mai Zong Vue** opened the **Taste of Asia** (2817 E. Washington Ave.) in part to keep the Hmong culture vibrant in Madison. Vue also volunteers at **Kajsiab House** (3518 Memorial Dr.), which serves more than three hundred Hmong elders who suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and chronic pain caused by the Vietnam War and refugee experience.

Last year Kajsiab House lost its federal funding. Her and Vue immediately stepped forward, sponsoring an egg-roll fundraiser and silent auction at their restaurant, raising more than ten-thousand dollars for the nonprofit organization.

"No matter how busy I am," Vue told the audience at the awards dinner last spring, "I feel so alive when I find the time to help others."

Work provides many of us with a purpose in life. Unfortunately, people with chronic and persistent mental illness are often ignored as potential employees even though they are capable of working. **Keva Sports Center** and **Manna Café & Bakery** have each stepped to the side of the road to provide these individuals with employment opportunities.

Keva Sports Center (8312 Forsythia St., Middleton) offers a host of indoor sports activities for Madison-area youth. **Eric Fritz**, Keva's owner, currently employs four people with mental disabilities. Among them is Mike Mundt, who has been working at Keva for five years. Mike has developed confidence in himself and his communication skills by performing basic work tasks essential to the functioning of the organization.

"It's really about being part of a community," Eric explains. "Mike

is very capable but couldn't find work because of his disability. I have, unexpectedly, found a steady, reliable, and very appreciative group of employees like Mike. By working, they realize that they are valued members of our community."

Mike and his co-workers are integrated into as many work activities as possible. Even when hired on a short-term basis, this labor pool is building reliable work histories and job references. Working Partnerships helps manage these special employees, making sure their job tasks are completed.

Similarly, entrepreneurs **Barb and Mike Pratzel** have been employing people with mental-health disabilities for more than twenty years, first at the Collins House Bed & Breakfast and Collins House Catering, and now at their latest venture, the Manna Café & Bakery (611 N. Sherman Ave.). They work with Yahara House, which manages a temporary placement program for people with mental disabilities.

According to Barb, it's a win-win situation. "We had a high turnover for dishwashers," Barb points out. "Then we started working with Yahara House, which did the training and screening for us. Their clients get a big sense of accomplishment. My regular staff gets to work with people they would never have gotten to know. Everyone is enriched in the process."

Are some people Good Samaritans because of their personalities, social sensitivities, or contextual factors, such as being able to set aside time to help? Although all three factors matter, researchers have found that time is the biggest predictor of who helps.

The owners of Taste of Asia, Keva Sports Center, and Manna Café & Bakery have all managed to find the time in their very hectic business lives to stop by the side of the road and lend a helping hand. In the process, they have gained a lot.

For more information about supported work partnerships for your business, contact **Working Partnerships** (278-8400) or **Yahara House** (280-4700).



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Denis Collins is a professor at Edgewood College's School of Business. His latest book is *Behaving Badly: Ethical Lessons from Enron* (<http://business.edgewood.edu/behavingbadly>).

Does your organization have cool, innovative policies or activities beneficial to employees or community that you think we should know about? If so, write to dcollins@edgewood.edu.