College team raises $100,000 in response to corporate call to kindness

At a time when many companies are looking for ways to trim any expense that doesn't contribute to the bottom line, Grafton-based Kapco Metal Stamping takes a decidedly different approach.

The latest example of its "greater good" philosophy came last week when the Kapco Charitable Challenge concluded.

The fund-raising challenge pitted teams from three local colleges, with a group from Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon emerging as the grand champion. Teams were also fielded by Marquette University and Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee.

In January, 15 teams were each given $1,000 and a challenge to find a local cause to make their own. From that seed money, more than $50,000 in cash and in-kind donations was raised in 20 days.

The Concordia VISTA team raised $9,000 to help a West Bend family of six children whose father and mother both died in the past five months.

In the second round of the challenge, the job got tougher for the Mequon school. The Concordia students were given the additional tasks of adopting a Make-A-Wish child, a 9-year-old with leukemia, and mentoring a group of high-school students, while supporting the West Bend family and committing other "random acts of kindness."

When the challenge concluded two weeks later, the local team had raised more than $100,000.

The winning team was selected based on money raised, and the publicity campaign each squad mounted. Each of the teams made liberal use of social networking sites, such as Facebook and YouTube.

Between the finalists, the schools raised approximately $250,000 and reached a reported 550,000 people through Web site hits, e-mails and personal presentations.

“The Kapco Charitable Challenge is an example of something I strongly believe in, and that is the idea of paying it forward. Even in these trying times, and maybe especially in times like this, we realize how blessed we are and how we are obligated to give back to those in need,” said Jim Kacmarcik, president of Kapco.

“This economy has taken its toll on maybe nine out of 10 businesses, but at Kapco we continue to see growth in terms of sales and employment. Programs like this are what our company is about. If there is ever the need to cutback, I believe we would look to other areas first.”
Kacmarcik said he hopes the example Kapco employees set in being involved in charitable causes is followed by other companies.

“I am in no position to tell other companies what they should be doing, but in my heart I know this is what we need to do,” he said.

The Grafton plant has about 200 employees, and Kacmarcik said virtually every one of them takes pride in the company’s role in supporting community causes.

In addition to the Charitable Challenge, which the company started in 2008, Kapco participates in a host of other community causes, including Hometown Heroes, Home Court Heroes, Heaven House, Community Corners and Kids for Kids.

“The reason we get involved in these programs is because we believe there is real strength in numbers, that two is stronger than one and 10 is stronger than two,” Kacmarcik said.

“It is never about what Kapko or Jim Kacmarcik can accomplish, but what we can all accomplish when we work together.”

He said he has been especially gratified about planting the seed of community involvement in the hearts of young people through the Charitable Challenge.

“We had 160 young people involved in the challenge, and I must have had 100 of them come up to me and say, ‘This is the most exciting thing I’ve have ever been involved in,’” Kacmarcik said.

The company’s tradition of charitable involvement dates back to the days of Kacmarcik’s father, Thomas, who founded the company in 1972 and died in 2000.

Kapco is a metal-stamping job shop that specializes in automated operations and heavy stamping projects. It has deep draw and quick-change die capabilities.

An ISO 9001 registered firm, the company provides fabrications, welding and assembly services, and offers engineering and product development assistance.