"Giving Back" is Good Business

sk not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961

Can we all agree that this was one of the great political lines of the Twentieth Century? It ranks right up there with Ronald Reagan's "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Well, if you substitute "community" for "country" in President Kennedy's inaugural address, you've got the makings of a dynamite public relations/marketing slogan as well. Giving back to the community in which you run your business just makes sense.

At my firm, Council Baradel, Kosmerl & Nolan, P.A., "community service" is one of our seven core values. It defines who we are. It's part of our DNA. It keeps us from being too insular. It's our firm's "window" to the greater community in which we live and work.



Severn Savings Bank is another example of a local business that gives back as part of its business plan. As Alan Hyatt, Severn's President and CEO will tell you:

"Our universe is Anne Arundel County. We reach out to all segments of the community, and we think it is appropriate to support our customers in any way we can."

Raymond Crosby, President and CEO of Annapolis-based Crosby Marketing Communications, a leading marketing, advertising and public relations firm in the Baltimore-Washington region, agrees with that sense of responsibility. As he told me recently: "Today's consumers want to do business with organizations that align with their own personal beliefs and values. Companies that demonstrate an ongoing commitment to supporting the community and worthwhile causes can truly differentiate themselves, build brand loyalty, and win more market share."

Some businesses adopt a particular cause like the environment, the Chesapeake Bay, or domestic violence, and concentrate their community service and charitable giving efforts in one or two of these areas. The company becomes identified with that cause in the eyes of the public.

At Council Baradel we do things a bit differently. We're a diverse group of twenty-six attorneys. We represent many interests, dissimilar causes, and different passions. We encourage each of our attorneys to find a "community" outside our law firm and to become involved in that community whether it's their homeowner's association. the Chamber of Commerce, a bar association, the Rotary Club, their local PTA, Maryland Hall, the SPCA, their church or synagogue, Historic Annapolis, Wellness House of Annapolis, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Anne Arundel Medical Center, the Green Hornets, Hospice of the Chesapeake, Anne Arundel County CASA, or anything else they feel strongly about. And we ask them not to just join, but to actually give back, to invest their time and talent in their community of choice, and to assume leadership roles in those communities.

This "giving back" idea started many years ago because we felt it was the "right thing" to do. But along the way, we've discovered a terrific, if unintended, collateral benefit. We support the efforts of our colleagues and staff by financially backing their organizations. Their "causes" become our causes. Their "passions" become our passions.

Our attorneys grow as people. Community service brings balance to their lives. Our communities appreciate the firm's contributions, and they become more invested in



the firm as a result. Our commitment to supporting their efforts and contributing to their causes builds a sense of community in our firm. Our service projects have built a more positive attitude at Council Baradel than any "team building" exercise could ever do.

Does it add directly to the bottom line? That's hard to tell. We've been a successful law firm in Annapolis for more than 30 years, so we like to think that our community involvement has something to do with our success. But we can't point to any line item in the budget to demonstrate that.

We know this, though. Community service has raised our profile in the community and given us a positive image. Folks think kindly of us. It has built employee loyalty to our firm. Our lawyers and staff know that we value their efforts in the various communities in which they serve. This mutual respect makes it easier for us to function as a team. We work better. Our people feel good about themselves . . . and our firm.

We can trace all that directly to our commitment to this community. You can take that to the bank!

ABOUT RONALD A. BARADEL

In addition to his legal profession, Ron Baradel is extremely active in the community, currently as a member of the Board of Trustees of Indian Creek school and previously



serving as President of the Rotary Club of Annapolis, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of St. Mary's Schools, and a member of the Board of Directors of Hospice Cup, Inc., Anne Arundel County CASA and Wellness House of Annapolis. Baradel@CouncilBaradel.com