

Restaurant Community Outreach A MENU OF IDEAS

Philanthropy isn't just good for the community; it's good for your restaurant. Getting involved in community outreach helps boost employee morale, promotes good will among customers and can increase sales. In fact, nearly 80 percent of Americans believe companies should support a community's social needs. Are you doing your part?

Whether you're just starting out and need inspiration, or your restaurant wants to increase its philanthropic efforts, this Menu of Ideas can help motivate and guide your efforts.

Starters

If you're new to community outreach work, think about these starters to "whet your palate" for bigger community outreach initiatives down the road.

Donate money to support a children's hospital, United Way, local non-profit, museum, library, school, zoo, military support group or homeless shelter. Look for a creative way to involve your diners in the experience. For example, let them know you're donating 10 percent of sales or \$1 off each menu item to a designated charity on a specific day.



Contribute to a food drive or a fundraising dinner. Contact your local shelter, and arrange to donate excess food to the homeless. Work with a local charity that delivers nutritious meals to people with AIDS or other life-threatening illnesses. More information: America's Second Harvest: www.secondharvest.org.



Ask employees to volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. Recruit your head chef to be a guest chef.



Encourage your chef to teach low-income families to prepare nutritious meals on a budget. More information: Share Our Strength: www.strength.org.



Build a float, distribute food samples or ask your employees to volunteer in community parades.

Chef's Specials

Once you've gained some experience with community outreach, you're ready to bite into something a little bigger, a little meatier. Consider this selection of ideas ...

Organize a themed dinner to benefit a local charity, hospital, museum or non-profit. Enlist your chef or a team of chefs from other restaurants to design a special-occasion menu, ask a DJ to provide music, and encourage local businesses to contribute items for a silent auction.



Organize a charity walk or galvanize the community to raise funds for cancer research, a new wing at your local hospital or another cause.



Create an annual coupon promotion campaign to benefit charity. Enlist your employees to sell \$1 coupons at the restaurant or at local retailers. Customers exchange the coupons for free sandwiches or appetizers.



Organize a pledge drive. Create a competition among your units to see which store can raise the most money or can create the most unique fundraiser.



Sponsor a golf tournament to benefit one or more local charities. You'll need to plan well in advance and enlist the support of other businesses in your community to ensure your tournament runs smoothly.



Recruit employee volunteers to help rehabilitate a home through Habitat for Humanity, or refurbish a local day care, orphanage, school or rehabilitation center.



Organize a dinner to show your support for military servicemen and women. Ask local businesses to donate child care vouchers, prepaid phone cards and food for those families.



Set up a foundation to oversee your charitable giving. You'll be able to make tax-free gifts while supporting the community that supports you. More information: Council on Foundations, www.cof.org.

First Course

Pick a cause. Non-profits often approach restaurants first when they need support. To allocate your resources responsibly and not get bombarded with requests, try to establish a focus for your efforts. You might have a long-standing commitment to one non-profit organization or a specific cause, such as a sick child in the community or fire-gutted local landmark. Survey employees to assess the volunteer activities that interest them and the causes they support.

Get buy-in from the top. Motivate your employees to get involved to ensure successful community outreach efforts. First, make sure the owner and/or senior-level executives at the restaurant endorse your efforts and demonstrate willingness to get their hands dirty and participate.

Set a firm timetable. Restaurant operators rarely experience down time, which means you'll need to set a realistic timetable to plan and execute your initiative. Include enough time to properly promote the initiative and ensure a great turnout. Anticipate potential setbacks, such as an employee illness, event location problems or local business issues.

Get employees involved. Your employees are your most vital resource—in the restaurant—and volunteering in the community. Solicit their ideas for potential community service projects. Use your company newsletter, email, staff meetings and/or Intranet to educate staff about the charity or cause you support, and provide details on the project the company is undertaking. Added incentives include paid time off to volunteer, appreciation luncheons and “volunteer” T-shirts, hats or other memorabilia. Provide stipends to cover parking, mileage, food and other expenses employees incur while volunteering. If you're hosting an event, ask your employees to arrange committee meetings, solicit sponsors, serve food, keep score, set up registration, distribute awards, sell raffle tickets, check coats and more. Or enlist their support to raise money for your target cause, and create a competition among store units to make it fun.

Find partners to help. Identify strategic partners to help maximize the success of your efforts, educate them about the cause you support, and provide specific details on what you need from them. If you're hosting a benefit dinner, recruit your local distributor to donate the beer and wine. Ask a local DJ to contribute music. Team up with a local radio station to help get the word out about your event. Recruit local businesses to contribute items to raffle.

Boost your turnout. Work with the charity you support to get their help promoting the event. Examples include newsletter and Web site articles, promotional letters to contacts in their database, joint press releases, etc. Ask local businesses to display fliers/cards, contact local radio stations to help publicize the event, and send out news releases.

Get the word out about your efforts. Keep the community and the news media informed about your recent successes by describing your efforts in news releases, the charity you supported and the event's outcome. Examples: How much money you raised, the research it will support, etc. Work with the charity to maximize promotional efforts and use their connections to get media coverage.

Use the National Restaurant Association as a resource. The National Restaurant Association can help restaurants get started or boost their community outreach efforts. You'll find Web links to organizations that support hunger prevention, youth development, improving health and improving communities. For more information, visit www.restaurant.org/community.

Kids Menu

Working with kids is one of the most rewarding ways to give back to your community. Whether you choose to sponsor local a Little League team or provide a restaurant internship to a high school student, the ideas below can help you make a lasting impact on your community's youth.

Encourage kids to be active and support a Little League team. Donate uniforms, offer your restaurant for end-of-season banquets, or ask employees to volunteer for coaching duties.



Get involved with America's Promise, one of the leading youth development organizations.
More information: americaspromise.org



Become involved with Big Brothers-Big Sisters of America, the oldest and largest youth mentoring organization in the United States. More information: www.bbbsa.org



Ask local YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs or other youth groups about how your restaurant can help them. You might be able to raise money for a good cause, donate food for an event or provide space for one of their activities or meetings.



Inspire students to learn about and consider a career in the restaurant industry. Participate in school career days, open houses and job-shadowing. Offer internships in your restaurant for local high-school students. Open your facility to elementary school field trips so students can learn how restaurants operate.



Offer space for tutoring sessions and after-school activities to local schools. Provide food and beverages.



Support school-lunch and school-breakfast programs for children with little to eat at home.



Motivate/reward local students who make honor roll or show perfect attendance with free pizza or dinner coupons. Acknowledge "Teacher Appreciation Day" by preparing a free lunch and delivering it to a school.