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Nonprofits work with corporations to benefit one another

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Kevin Madigan](#) Contributing writer

Increasing numbers of major corporations have concluded that there are more benefits to conducting business than raking in profits. Following recent corporate scandals and a shaky economy, these behemoths have begun re-evaluating their strategies and undergone image make-overs stressing the need to reach out and help others.

Although partnerships between corporations and nonprofit groups are nothing new in themselves, their scope and diversity have expanded, as have their mutual rewards.

Atlanta law firm [King](#) and Spalding LLP is at the forefront of this trend, having established a partnership with Habitat for Humanity in Atlanta Inc. in the past decade that provides free legal services for residents.

"It's a hand up, instead of a handout," said Linda Parrish, King and Spalding's director of community affairs. "We're always on the lookout for pro bono opportunities, and this gives our people a chance to make a difference in the community."

The firm also has sponsored and built several homes for Habitat.

Revitalization of buildings and houses is high on the list at [Allstate Insurance](#). "You've probably heard of Atlanta Tool Bank," said Gwen Lampkin-McDaniel, Allstate's field communications manager. "We worked with them the other week. We have people who go out and do painting and cleaning, and assist with those things that the elderly can't do for themselves."

Allstate invites all nonprofits to apply for grants.

Allstate funds organizations that provide skill-development workshops for women and sponsors youth programs that address literacy, anti-violence initiatives and money management. She noted that the company also is reaching out to nonprofits that cater to the growing Latin American and Asian-American sectors.

A local success story without equal is The Home Depot Inc., and it, too, has developed a program that goes beyond just passing out cash to those in need. The latest recipient of the company's largesse is CityCares, a volunteer alliance started in 1992 that brings together a network of entrepreneurial organizations and offers almost 21,000 nationwide volunteer opportunities on a monthly basis. Hands On Atlanta is the well-established local affiliate, and the aim of this alliance is to coordinate efforts in local communities based on active participation and civilian engagement.

"The Home Depot Building Better Communities" initiative was rolled out in summer 2002, and it offers a multitude of benefits to participants, such as skill trading among volunteers and Home Depot employees, training on project management, and on-site supervision and evaluation.

"It's helped us to grow in an extraordinary way," said Elizabeth Feichter, Hands On Atlanta's director of development. "They are so plugged in to what we're doing."

Hands On Atlanta also has an active partnership with Accenture.

"Businesses have the potential to help transform society for the better," said Darienne Dennis of Accenture's corporate communications department, adding that the company is involved in myriad programs that emphasize the importance of philanthropic involvement.

"We have done a number of pro bono initiatives for Hands On Atlanta, which allows our employees to apply their core competencies," said Dennis, noting that such long-term arrangements foster a more holistic relationship between companies.

"It serves as a catalyst for skills development," she added. "For example, we have small teams of volunteers that plan and manage our more than 40 projects a year. The project and people management skills they develop when organizing these initiatives, some of which involve several hundred people, are easily transferable back to the workplace."

During the past year, Accenture staff has provided more than 900 hours of pro bono service to Hands On Atlanta worth \$250,000 and has volunteered more than 10,000 hours to the charity.

The need for affordable housing is being addressed by John Wieland Homes & Neighborhoods Inc.

"We're providing housing not only for individuals who can afford to purchase our homes but also for those who are less fortunate," said Carissa Easley, Wieland Homes' director of community relations.

The company also is donating a 9,000-square-foot apartment building to the Atlanta Union Mission that is designed for transitional accommodations, and is working with Families First to meet the needs of single mothers.

Then there is Benevolink, a local upstart getting under way this fall that adds a different twist to corporate-nonprofit relationships. This free, Web-based service will enable shoppers to choose whom they contribute to through the products they purchase.

"We're trying to marry the world of corporate marketing to philanthropy," said Chris Turner, Benevolink's vice president of business partner relations.