

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY STARTS WITH PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Sundt Foundation

by Krystal-Rose Agu



Eric Hedlund, the Executive VP, COO and Texas District Manager of Sundt Construction. In 1999, his company created the Sundt Foundation, a nonprofit that aims to help disadvantaged children and adults, predominantly through matching employee donations.

It was the summer of 1977. An 18-year-old Eric Hedlund had a summer job pouring concrete for a local company. The father of one of his high school friends worked as a concrete salesman and happened to be assigned to a project Hedlund was working on.

The workers at the company were the men's men type tough guys, one might call them. The father of Hedlund's friend became Hedlund's mentor, offering advice on how to act as the new guy on the job.

He told Hedlund that on his first day, the men would fill the teen's wheelbarrow to the brim so that when Hedlund tried to push the wheelbarrow, it would tip over and the concrete would spill. He advised Hedlund that when this happened he shouldn't get angry or frustrated, but to shovel the concrete back into the wheelbarrow and continue carrying out his work for the day, unfazed.

The events unfolded as predicted. When the wheelbarrow tipped over, Hedlund simply shoveled the concrete back inside and carried on with his work, surprising the

COURTESY OF SUNDT CONSTRUCTION INC.



Sundt Construction employee-owners take part in a demonstration by the San Antonio Fire Dept. during National Safety Week earlier this year.

co-workers who anticipated a much different reaction.

That summer, the teenager learned three valuable lessons that have stuck with him for nearly 40 years: To never value himself above any trade, to always value people and treat them with respect, and to respect the positive influence of a good mentor.

A CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

At 57, Hedlund is now Senior Vice President and Texas District Manager of Sundt Construction Inc. (Sundt), a full-service general contractor that specializes in construction management, design-build and general contracting, with offices in Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio. Founded in 1890, Sundt is one of the oldest construction com-

panies in the U.S. and aims to improve the communities where it operates.

In 1999, Sundt created the Sundt Foundation, a nonprofit organization that seeks to help disadvantaged children and adults predominantly through employee-owner donations, which the company matches. The foundation also offers financial assistance to other nonprofits with the same mission, and continually accepts applications from nonprofits that need support.

One of the organizations that drew the attention of the Sundt Foundation was the Texas Alliance for Minorities in Engineering, or TAME, a nonprofit that encourages the participation of women and minorities in STEM fields: science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Right now the building and construction industry is short of people, Hedlund says. Additionally, our diversity is not where it should be. However, that creates an opportunity to solve both challenges by bringing an increasingly diverse workforce into construction and adding to the total count of construction professionals.

TAME offers hands-on science programming for K-12 students as well as mentoring and scholarship opportunities for college students, says TAME's Executive Director, Savita Raj.

GENEROSITY BREEDS OPPORTUNITY

For 30 years, TAME has conducted an annual competition where students from all across Texas compete in a math test, a science test and



This year's annual State Engineering Design Challenge was inspired by Boeing's 787 Dreamliner. Students had an hour to design, build, and test a self-supported wrapping machine that could cover a fuselage with a single layer of fiber with no gaps or overlapping strands.

an engineering design challenge. Last year, the Sundt Foundation made a \$3,300 grant to help send 300 TAME students and 75 chaperones to the competition in San Antonio, free of cost.

Corporate donations, such as this one, open up new opportunities to TAME students. In the case of the San Antonio competition, some students would not have been able to participate due to financial barriers. In this instance and others, students' lives are positively changed because of acts of generosity.

According to Raj, all of the high school seniors who participate in these annual competitions go to college; more than 80 percent of the students major in a STEM-related field, and around half of those students study some form of engineering.

Those kinds of numbers are exciting for us because it shows that our stu-

dents have put in the work and they are moving on to what we hope they want to achieve in their lives, she says.

The work we do directly fills the employment pipeline for a variety of corporations. From national defense to construction, everybody needs engineers or scientists or scientific-thinking people. And so, making sure that workforce is ready and able to work is critical.

TODAY'S INVESTMENT IN TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE RECRUITS

Jenna Goolsby, a recent graduate of Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, is an example of a past TAME student who is now succeeding in the workforce.

As an engineer-in-training at Peloton Land Solutions Inc., an engineering and planning firm based in Austin, Texas,

Goolsby prepares project documents, designs roads and water lines and is learning engineering software.

Goolsby shares that even though math and science were attractive subjects when she was a child, her experience at TAME and the mentors she encountered through the organization gave



More than 150 awards were presented to students at TAME's 31st annual State STEM Competition, hosted at Texas A&M University-San Antonio.

COURTESY OF JEREMY DONALD (TOP) AND AURELINA PRADO (BOTTOM)



More than 100 student competitors (grades 6-12) from across the Dallas area participated in the 2016 TAME Dallas STEM Competition, hosted at Tarrant County College in February 2016. In addition to testing students' knowledge of math and science concepts, the competition promotes teamwork, leadership and academic achievement.

her the confidence she needed to pursue a STEM career path. TAME created a very positive and safe place for me to explore my interest in engineering, she says.

For some, pursuing a STEM career may seem intimidating and unattainable. However, Hedlund prefers not to view STEM as just a challenging, technical field of work, but as a way of thinking, which he says many people already possess and have the ability to focus on and improve.

In my opinion, STEM education is about a thought process, he says. It's the process of formulating a hypothesis or basis for reasoning. It basically hones your critical thinking skills, which is helpful for your professional life.

The Texas Alliance for Minorities in Engineering (TAME) encourages the participation of women and minorities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.

THINKING OF THE FUTURE

From civil engineers and project managers to estimators and support staff, Hedlund understands that critical thinking is what best characterizes the employee-owners at Sundt. It is a driving factor that's propelled the company for the past 126 years.

Having benefited from the wisdom of several mentors throughout his professional career, Hedlund now aims to use a STEM approach to problem-solving to offer insight and professional development to his employees, just like what his high school friend's dad did for him years ago.

As Sundt Construction continues to expand (it has offices in Arizona, California, Texas and Utah), one of Hedlund's main goals is to continue to give back to the communities that have helped grow the company. Specifically, he'd like to focus on the new communities in which his teams will conduct business.

It's a broadening out of all of our company campuses and makes the mission of Sundt more impactful, Hedlund said. 🐼

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