

Diane Burns Lennar Homes

In 2003, October or November, a former project manager brought ADV to the organization. We were looking for a charity to be involved with. So he brought ADV to the table. On Dec. 12, management decided we'd like to have a Christmas party for ADV.



We gave our associates a budget for each family. The associates dressed in elves hats and went shopping with their department managers. It was the most awesome, inspiring thing you have ever seen. Most of them said they enjoyed that holiday shopping at the last minute more than they had enjoyed shopping for any of their family, because these were gifts that people wanted and needed. We had a budget of \$300 per person.

It was eye opening. The most touching thing was not just seeing the room. One of our managers said he was sitting across the room and he saw a little girl sitting at a table by herself. She looked forlorn. He walked across the room and as he approached her, her eyes got as big as saucers and she dove under the table. He said at that moment, the association with ADV went from his head to his heart. He said, I knew what we were doing was important.

From there, all of the associates were so involved that the following year we went from random acts of caring to focused acts of caring. ADV was a shoe in. We've enjoyed everything we've done with them since.

Two years ago, we wanted Santa Claus. We asked our associates who wants to be Santa Claus this year. We had asked one of our associates. This associate was dragging his feet. He is Brazilian and he was upset about being brow beaten about being Santa Claus. He said "Why me?"

I said, it's very important, Carlos, because some of these children have never seen a Santa Claus that looked like them. So under duress, he became Santa. He walked through the door while we were all singing around the Christmas tree, and as he walked through the door, one little boy looked up, dropped his music and ran and embraced his legs. I have still not been able to get the Santa Claus suit back from Carlos.

Our involvement with ADV has impacted every associate at every level. No matter how large or how small their involvement has been. Because they see the results of what they are doing. They see the impact that they're making. Every

year we do a holiday giving tree and we put up the hopes and wishes. In this economy, the company can no longer afford to buy all the gifts. So the associates are doing it out of their own hearts. Every year I have to add more things to the giving tree because they disappear so rapidly. They say, "When I buy that sweater, I know somebody really wants that sweater." They buy the sweater and maybe a new purse and a scarf or something else to go with it. So one gift becomes two or three gifts.

It's very exciting to see the looks on their faces as they bring in the gifts and put them under the tree because it's touched their heart.

There have been many discussions about the eye-opening occurrence among some of the associates who did not understand how prevalent domestic violence is in the community. Especially around holidays when family strains are stronger. They were unaware how many children were affected by DV. The associates have become more conscious in their own lives of the words they use. It's made them more aware of how they behave in their own families.

They are more observant. I had an associate the other day who is now involved in filing a police report. She overheard someone make threatening comments. Before she might have walked away. This time she went to a supervisor and reported what she had overheard. So it's little things, little steps that eventually will conquer the mountain.

For me personally, I came from domestic abuse in the 1960s. In the '60s you were your husband's property. You did what your husband said. You had no recourse. Divorce in the early '60s was unheard of. You didn't do that. Today I get to give back. I get to see the change, the growth. I'm passionate about it. I come from the experience. So for me to be able to do this, I'd work here for free just for the opportunity to work with ADV. It's very personal and very real.

These women will do it in a much shorter time frame and in a much healthier way than I did. In the past, you had to have the personal strength to overcome all the obstacles on your own. For these women, instead of it taking 20 years, they can get over those hurdles in the six months they're at the shelter. They can get the education. They can get the job skills. They have day care to help them. There are so many things that are available today because of organizations like ADV that make these lives that seem so tragic today ... tomorrow or next month or next year be very rewarding and enriching lives. And they, in turn, are learning to break that cycle of violence. They're learning and they're teaching their children, and their children are teaching their friends. And before long, that will conquer it.

I can't say enough about ADV. Not just for what they do for individuals, but for how they interact within the community. How they deport themselves when they're at organizational meetings or at other affairs. They're always there and positive. It's, "We're here, we're going to make a difference and we're going to make lives better." There's no self-doubt. It's all very positive. The belief in what they're doing, in the organization and the people within the organization, having the staff that your confident with, having the families come in out of the worst of circumstances and knowing that they are going to be safe. That this is a sanctuary for them. It's probably one of the best jobs you can have.