



GIVE 'TIL IT WORKS





YOUwouldn't guess after a casual encounter with this entrepreneur-cum-author, whose infectious joie de vivre could raise smiles in a mortuary, but Barbara Stegemann knows something about want. "I was raised on welfare by a single mother," she announces almost cheerfully. "Still, I never appreciated the handouts. I just don't believe in charity."

The comment may seem strange coming from the 41-year-old, Halifax-based businesswoman who, having survived her own economically compromised childhood, is now helping the people of Afghanistan emerge from decades of disastrous subsistence on the foreign heroin trade. But, she insists, her effort there isn't charity; it's commerce. Specifically, it's her self-financed project to transform that desperately impoverished, war-torn country's orange blossom oil into perfume for sale in high-end North American boutiques and over the Internet.

Afghan Special Forces policemen walk through a poppy field as they search for Taliban fighters in the village of Sanjaray in Zhari district early April 26, 2008. REUTERS/Goran Tomasevic (AFGHANISTAN)

INCREASINGLY, PRIVATE ENTERPRISES ARE MEASURING THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THEIR GENEROSITY AND CALIBRATING THEIR BEQUEST STRATEGIES ACCORDINGLY.

By Alec Bruce



"MY CONCEPT IS TO PROVIDE AFGHAN FARMERS WITH A BETTER ALTERNATIVE TO THE POPPY, WHICH IS USED TO MAKE HEROIN."

BARBARA STEGEMANN
HALIFAX-BASED BUSINESSWOMAN

"My concept is to provide Afghan farmers with a better alternative to the poppy, which is used to make heroin," she explains. "I buy the raw material directly from them and then I use the enormous buying power of North American women to keep the cycle going. The more perfume I sell, the more oil I buy. That way, we're part of the solution. We're doing something constructive to help shift the country's economy."

Though Stegemann's initiative is both innovative and unorthodox, her approach to corporate good works may mirror a larger trend in the private sector. Increasingly, businesses in Canada are measuring the actual impacts of their generosity and calibrating their bequest strategies accordingly. It's no longer sufficient (if it ever really was) to throw money indiscriminately at a cause. Now, there must be an efficacious return which produces durable social rewards.

Indeed, on the heels of new research in 2008, Imagine Canada (a national program which promotes public and corporate giving) reported: "Community investment initiatives of many of the

country's largest corporations have moved beyond 'cheque-book philanthropy' and are leveraging their assets in more ways. While the demand for these companies to give is persistent and increasing, their strategic approaches to community investment and the ways in which they are engaging their employees and their broader stakeholder networks... are quite innovative."

Certainly, Atlantic Canadian businesses are among the most generous "gifters" in the nation (*Atlantic Business Magazine's* 2010 Top 50 CEOs, for example, collectively gave \$38,356,000 to worthy causes). But the way many organizations are targeting their efforts is revealing. Saint John-based J.D. Irving Limited actively supports public education and lifelong learning. According to its website: "An initiative of J.K. Irving and Bev MacDonald of School District 8, the Pals for Prince Charles Partnership was launched in Saint John in 2000. The students (K-8) of this inner city school are supported by 140 employee mentors who each spend up to two hours a week during their work day helping the students with reading, math skills,

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sports, music and more. The best news: 50 per cent more alumni are graduating from high school since the program began.”

The rationale for this and similar programs is clear, as the company articulates in the health and wellness section of its site: “We believe that innovation and productivity thrives in happy, vibrant communities. And supporting organizations that nurture health and wellness improves the quality of life for everyone. J.D. Irving Limited contributes to several causes that uplift our communities, including raising funds for research on various diseases, supporting food banks, and preserving parklands.”

Undoubtedly, the overarching objective of generating long-term social benefits is also what’s behind Husky Energy Inc.’s recent \$2.5-million endowment to The Rooms, Newfoundland and Labrador’s largest and most integrated cultural public space. The funds will be used to cover half the cost of an extensive fourth-floor renovation to create a new 5,600-square-foot gallery that will, among other things, showcase ethnol- ogical and historical artefacts from the



Barb Stegemann, motivational speaker, author and manufacturer, is using the buying power of North American women to help the Afghan economy. She’s buying poppy oil from Afghan farmers to make perfume, offering them a way out of the heroin trade.

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Brian Thompson, president of Vector Aerospace Services-Atlantic in PEI, says corporate gifting is a strategic social investment, not a handout. Health and education are two areas which his company is dedicated to supporting.

18th and 19th centuries and provide an opportunity to explore the history and culture of the Inuit, Innu, Mi'kmaq, Metis, and European and other settlers to the province.

Explains Husky spokeswoman Sharon Graham: "Our community investment program focuses on three key areas: education, health and community involvement. Clearly, The Rooms falls into a couple of those categories... community involvement and education. It's a values-driven perspective for us. One of our core values involves respecting and encouraging diversity in the workplace, in both creating a multi-cultural workforce and an environment for cultural diversity and diversity of opinion in the workforce. And the Husky Energy Gallery celebrates the cultural diversity within Newfoundland and Labrador. So that's a pragmatic consideration."

For his part, Brian Thompson, president of Summerside, PEI-based Vector Aerospace Services – Atlantic Inc., sees his company's extensive corporate giving program as a strategic investment, not a handout. The firm, which specializes in aviation repair and overhaul, provides

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hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to hospitals, schools, post-secondary institutes and arts festivals in the province. "It comes from very sincere roots," Thompson says. "We are a part of this community. So we have a real practical interest in helping to keep it vibrant, healthy and well-educated."

He adds: "We look at several areas. Health and education are both key things we think are necessary. These are the building blocks of a community. Arts and culture are also very important. There is also a little bit of another kind of self-interest in that we attract people from outside of the province to work for us. So, anything we can do to enhance the liveability of our communities is naturally in our own best interest."

To Barbara Stegemann, the real world ramification of her venture is nothing short of a better, more just, more humane planet. She says the idea for her perfume, Afghanistan Orange Blossom, stemmed partly from one of the thesis points in a book she wrote not long ago entitled *The 7 Virtues of a Philosopher Queen*, a personal treatise on living well and doing good. "In the book, I talk about the fact

that women in North America own the buying power," she says. "Every advertiser knows this. And yet one in five children live in poverty. We have war, we have genocide. We have to fix these things. I can't expect others to do what I talk about in my book unless I'm practicing what I preach."

In fact, it has taken her an astonishingly brief period of time (barely eight months) to move from concept to product sales. Now, she says the orders are flooding in, and Afghan suppliers are standing by to supply her with more oil at prices sufficient to make the switch from poppies worth their while. "I really started absolutely nowhere," she laughs. "But as I always say, your network is your net worth. And we're making networks half a world away. Now that I'm at the banquet, so to speak, I feel I have to bust the doors wide open for others."

None of this may be welfare, as she insists it isn't. Nevertheless, there is a giving heart at work. And like so many other business people in the Atlantic region these days, she's deftly managed to enlist commerce as charity's able ally. | **ABM**

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BRIAN THOMPSON
PRESIDENT
VECTOR AEROSPACE
SERVICES ATLANTIC INC.

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