



Santa's brew: Paul McCarthy, Leslie Collins, Matthew Dwyer, Scott Howell, Matthew Lewis, Colin Ryan, Corey Button, and Mark Seaborn (left-right) of Ernst & Young serve up free early morning coffee and hot chocolate on the steps of the Fortis Building in downtown St. John's. Donations were accepted for the local YMCA.

# Giving gifts

**As one firm found out, the right corporate Christmas event can do wonders for the community within the office walls and beyond**

**T**his time last year, I shared the story of a Christmas Pageant – Target Marketing's tale of cross-dressing, beer-swilling, mad-dancing mummies taking on the town for their unconventional seasonal office bash. For this year's Christmas story, I bring you the 6 DaEYs of Holiday Spirit (the EY stands for Ernst & Young) – one organization's way to get out of the office and into the community, giving something extra. And getting a lot back in return.

## Something bigger

"We were brainstorming last fall about how we could bring some of the things we do together on a bigger scale for the people that we're committed to," says Lynn Healey, a partner in the firm's St. John's office, of the genesis of their spirit week.

They came up with the idea of a multi-day event – enough time to try out a few different activities, and really get into the spirit of the season.

Ernst & Young held its usual cake auction in their office building, and a lively in-house online auction – employees donate gifts like a weekend at their cottage, a home-cooked dinner, photographs

they've taken, or home-made wine. All proceeds went to the YM-YWCA.

There was also a coat drive, a toy drive, a food drive. Wrapping gifts and waiting tables. Peddling coffee and hot chocolate on the street for donations. And more.

None of these activities, in themselves, is screamingly original. But put them all together in a week-long spree of goodwill, and nice things happen. Including \$12,000 raised for local charities, and enough enjoyment and enthusiastic word of mouth that 2011 will bring 12 DaEYs – not just in St. John's, but in the company's offices across Atlantic Canada.

## A dose of reality

Christmas is a notoriously busy time of year – especially for companies who are dealing with year-end responsibilities (for those whose "year-end" actually comes at the year's end). And, let's face it, the corporate environment is jam-packed with busy people throughout the year. It even took some days of co-ordination to catch Healey for a chat.

So, about this plan to run activities for six days straight ... did the partners have any second thoughts?

"We definitely did!" Healey says, not missing a beat. "And we do again this year.

"Last year we pulled it all together really quickly, and worried we were taking on too much. But we got the right team to chip in."

Therein lies a huge benefit of a week of cultivating the holiday spirit. Whether the Ernst & Young team were out on the streets of downtown St. John's selling Santa's Brew, being blown away when they saw the overflowing bins of donated food, or serving tables and decorating at the Hungry Heart Café, Healey says everyone brought the buzz back to the office.

"From a partner perspective, it was incredible to see," Healey says. "It made us very proud."

## Some advice

Facing the 12 DaEYs of Spirit just around the corner, Healey has some words of wisdom for both her own colleagues, and any other business looking to do something a little bigger this year.

First: engage staff at all levels. Don't leave it to the upper management, and don't download all the tasks on the newest or most junior employees. Get in it together. "Actually, I was worried that some of the new, not-so-experienced staff would be wary of getting involved. But some of the younger ones really came on board with their knowledge of social media, new ideas, things us older accountants might not think about."

Next: never overthink or overplan. Don't be intimidated by details or expectations. As Healey says: "Just make it happen."

Because: It's the right thing to do. Team building, doing good, giving back ... "you can make a significant difference in your community," she says.

## A holiday challenge

As you plan this year's seasonal celebrations, take a moment to think beyond the office. Get to know the greater community a little better. Engage your colleagues. Be creative, have fun, and do some group good. Then go join the cross-dressing, beer-swilling, mad-dancing ad agency people across the street. Happy holidays, all! | **ABM**

*Tell me about your fabulous corporate party or getaway! Write stephaniejporter@gmail.com*