

[IDEAS 2 GO]

Community Support

In a tough economic climate, Manley's still makes charitable contributions a priority.

BY HOWARD RIELL

Rough economic times aren't preventing Manley's Mighty Mart LLC in Binghamton, New York, from remaining a vital force in its own hometown. For the owners and management, being an integral part of their community is simply a way of life — no matter what's going on with the economy.

Manley's culture of philanthropy originated with the company's founder, CEO and majority stockholder, Tony Manley, who started the business in 1964. "He had polio when he was a child, and throughout his life he was helped a great deal through community efforts," explained President Jack Brayton. "The YMCA, particularly, helped him with swimming. You would never know he had polio if you looked at him today."

Manley began his business career

repairing cars in Binghamton, New York. On his first day of business, so the story goes, he had only \$10 in his pocket, and couldn't make change for his customers. He built his business slowly, and in the early 1980s founded his convenience store chain. Today, Manley's 23 stores generate annual revenue of about \$140 million.

IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

There is no annual budget, per se, for philanthropy, according to Brayton. Instead, Manley's maintains relationships. "We make five- and 10-year commitments to organizations," he pointed out. Manley's made a \$150,000 commitment to the Binghamton University School of Management — a group of competitive college seniors at the university analyze nonprofit organizations in the commu-

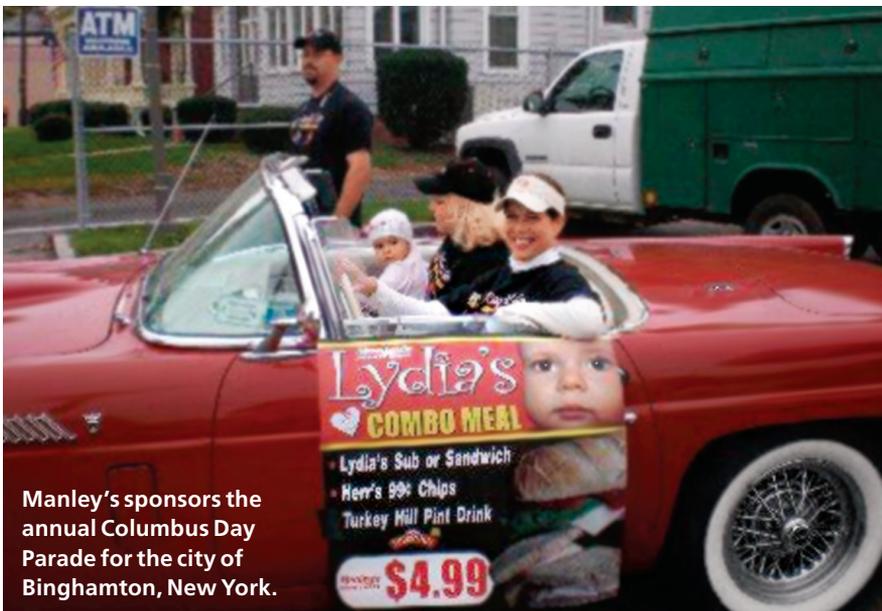
nity. The students "do a thorough investigation and write a report they get a grade for. That determines where our money goes," stated Brayton.

The students develop recommendations for local non-profit leaders regarding the formulation and implementation of strategies that increase the odds of long-term survival and effective execution of its mission. "All of the [non-profit] groups benefit from the students' work," said Teresa Butler, product manager for Manley's. "The best project every semester gets to give the \$2,000 to their non-profit to help implement the students' work."

Among the organizations that have been or are being helped through this program are Aging Futures, Southern Tier AIDS Project, Musical Voyage/Tri-Cities Opera, Kopernik Observatory and Space Education Center, Habitat for Humanity, The Boy Scouts of America and Broome County Head Start.

"THEY DESERVE OUR SUPPORT"

Despite the hard times, said Brayton, "We have not cut back. We are committed to it for the long term. We put that money aside, and we're going to give it."



Manley's sponsors the annual Columbus Day Parade for the city of Binghamton, New York.

DID YOU KNOW?
 In 2007, Warren Alpert of Warren Equities, the holding company of NACS member Drake Petroleum, ranked 16 on *The Chronicle of Philanthropy's* list of America's 50 biggest donors.

The justification, to his way of thinking, is simple. "We are a community-based, family-run organization that is dependent upon the people who support us, and they deserve our support. If [the money] has to go out of our pocket, then it goes out of our pocket."

As a result, Brayton said his stores receive loads of goodwill as well as additional customers. "We have been told that people shop with us because of what we do in the community...We don't have to spend the dollars on advertising that we used to because we've put the money in the charitable organizations." Thus, the monies that used to be sent to an advertising agency "now go right into the pockets of the charitable organizations, and as a result we get the advertising."

For the past three years, Manley's has sponsored Binghamton's Ross Park Zoo. The retailer provides labor, materials and equipment for a small convenience store operation on the property. "We took the building they had and renovated it," Brayton said. "We also have a kiosk stationed in a different location in the zoo that we renovated and operate." All profits from the store and kiosk go to the zoo.

Manley's also sponsors the annual Columbus Day Parade for the city of Binghamton, held in early October. The company's contribution brings about 15 different area high school bands to the city of Binghamton for the parade and a band competition.

At a certain point, said Brayton, things get real simple: "We are the only Binghamton-based company that lives here, works here, is headquartered here." Competitors, he concluded, "have a presence here, but they are not headquartered here. You need to support the people who support you." **NACS**

Howard Riell is a 30-year veteran journalist who has covered the convenience store industry for two decades.

[BY THE NUMBERS]

TOP
5



Greenest cities in the United States

1. Portland, Oregon

2. San Francisco, California

3. Boston, Massachusetts

4. Oakland, California

5. Eugene, Oregon



(Source: *Popular Science*, February 2008, www.popsi.com; data compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Geographic Society's Green Guide)

