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**CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS**
*By Tom Holcom, president of Pioneer Financial Services*

Do you think that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a fancy public relations tool used when a company is caught doing something wrong? Or is it just another marketing campaign wrapped in a warm and fuzzy package? I don't think so!

CSR can be a powerful tool for both the community and associates. It is an investment in the future; an opportunity to meet societal needs that individual philanthropy may not be able to address. Once it becomes a part of the corporate culture, CSR can be a powerful internal force and lead to increased loyalty and superior service for both customers and associates. As long as your CSR program is a true effort to give back, and not just a marketing or public relations effort, it can pay huge dividends for everyone involved.

**Have a comprehensive strategy**

When our company, Pioneer Financial Services (PFS), which provides financial services to the military community, was developing a CSR program, we focused on a comprehensive strategy that could provide giving alternatives, be agile to fit changing needs, and have the greatest possible impact for the cost.

We began by defining a gap or area of need in our military family marketplace, and designed our strategy to meet a number of those needs as they arose. The overall goals, however, must be a consistent level of giving back to the community.

Since most companies like ours cannot match the high dollar amounts given by larger corporations like General Motors or Microsoft, we learned that by diversifying our donations, we can have a greater impact. For example, our giving in the past few years has included:

- More than \$20,000 for service members affected by Hurricane Katrina
- More than \$20,000 supporting Angel Flight charitable aviation—help and hope to military families
- \$20,000 to advance leadership training at the Command and General Staff College
- \$43,000 in commissary gift certificates to military families during the holiday season
- \$20,000 for the Operation Iraqi Freedom Charitable Flight Fund
- \$5,000 to the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation
- \$25,000 supporting Business Executives for National Security
- \$5,000 to Fisher House, a program for military families similar to Ronald McDonald
- \$48,000 in scholarships for military families

Cash donations are not, however, the only way to help. In-kind donations can be an effective way to serve a community by providing an immediate impact since cash donations can take time to filter through an organization. In the past few years, PFS has:

- Sent thousands of phone cards to troops deployed overseas so they can call home for free
- Handed out hundreds of Identi-Kid kids to military families so they have a record of their children's fingerprints and information in case of an emergency
- Encouraged saving money early by giving piggy banks to military children; we then give children 50 cents for every "A" and 25 cents for every "B" on their report cards to put in the piggy bank
- Sponsor numerous awards and events that recognize and benefit service members and their families