

Continental Coverage

How Continental Office Environments reaches out to Columbus-area students

For some companies, community service means more than just the giving of time and money. It's taking steps to make sure that a specific need is addressed in the local community.

That has been the motivation behind Continental Office Environments' involvement in Project Mentor, a Columbus City Schools and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio program that matches selected district students with a mentor during their high school years. The mentor serves as a leadership figure in the student's academic life, helping to steer each student's life decisions in a positive fashion and keeping the students on track to earn their high school diplomas.

Continental Office Environments, led by President and CEO Ira Sharfin, was a pioneering partner in the Project Mentor program. Sharfin's company recruited 18 mentors in the program's first year and has since recruited eight more. The numbers reflect more than 20 percent of Continental's office staff making a significant commitment to the cause – one of the largest percentages of associate involvement for a Project Mentor partner organization.

Last year, Continental staffers had the opportunity to organize a spring luncheon for mentors and students from Mifflin International Middle School. The lunch, which was held at the Governor's Residence, included educational activities, such as a tour of the residence grounds and lessons on plants, wildlife and history of the state of Ohio. Gov. Ted Strickland and first lady Frances Strickland were on hand to personally greet the mentors and students.

Project Mentor represents a large part of Continental's involvement in community causes, but the company maintains a significant presence in other areas of the community, as well.

Continental staffers work closely with St. Stephens Community House on a number of outreach programs, most notably the annual St. Stephen's Halloween party. For one night each October, Continental's 40,000-square-foot showroom is transformed for the Halloween party, which draws 60 children.

Continental is also involved in planning and fund-raising for the annual "Chix With Stix" all-women golf outing to benefit the Stefanie Spielman Fund for Breast Cancer Research. Last year, the event was sold out, with 140 golfers and more than \$36,000 donated to cancer research.