

## AMERICA RESPONDS

# Corporate compassion



Locally owned Tide Cleaners stores helped Tide offer free laundry and dry cleaning service to front-line workers. AUSTIN WALSH STUDIO 2017/PHOTO PROVIDED BY TIDE

## Companies across country respond to extreme circumstances with kindness, generosity

**Matt Alderton** Special to USA TODAY

To assess the health of a business, company executives commonly look at its balance sheet. With the lives of employees and customers on the line, however, leaders at many companies used COVID-19 as an opportunity to rethink their priorities. In the face of a global pandemic, they've come to understand that corporate health must be strategically aligned with public health, which means focusing as much on people as on profits — and, sometimes, sacrificing wealth for wellness. From retail and hospitality to technology and transportation, companies in virtually every sector have made kindness and generosity their newest performance metrics. Here are some of things they've done.

Continued on page 26

## AMERICA RESPONDS



Brian Kalma says Zappos “saw a need emerging” for what became “Customer Service for Anything.” ZAPPOS

Continued from page 24

### Zappos: How can we help you?

You may think of it as an online shoe store, but Zappos says its true purpose is “to live and deliver WOW.” In response to COVID-19, it has taken its customer-first orientation to new extremes by launching “Customer Service for Anything.”

A hotline accessible by phone, text, email or social media, Customer Service for Anything helps pandemic-stressed customers navigate the new world in which they’re living by answering virtually any query, no purchase necessary. Employees have facilitated food deliveries, for example, made Netflix recommendations and located out-of-stock grocery items. They’ve talked to single parents who needed adult conversation while quarantined with kids. They even helped a doctor get a hold of 300 pulse oximeters for remote monitoring of discharged COVID-19 patients.

“Zappos’ traditional customer service team has always answered any question that someone reaches out about. For example, customers have been known to call in for pizza delivery and help with navigational directions,” explains Brian Kalma, an “entrepreneur in residence” at Zappos. “We saw a need emerging in the world — solving for the uncertainty we ourselves were feeling — and quickly realized that by pivoting our customer service team to not only answer but specifically *encourage* these types of questions, we could serve our customers and community at large.”



Trampoline-park chain Sky Zone helped facilitate birthday parties even while closed. KEVIN WINZELER/PHOTO PROVIDED BY SKY ZONE

### Tide: One less chore for heroes

Americans have been using Tide laundry detergent to eliminate stubborn stains since 1946. During COVID-19, Tide saw an opportunity to offer a different kind of cleansing. What it’s trying to remove isn’t so much grass, grease or coffee stains, but rather some of the stress that’s weighing on front-line workers dealing with the coronavirus. Tide hopes to give them one less thing to worry about with free laundry and dry cleaning through its Loads of Hope program.

Typically, Loads of Hope uses a mobile laundromat to provide charitable laundry service after natural disasters. This time, however, Tide turned to its network of locally owned and operated Tide Cleaners stores.

“When we saw front-line workers working 12-hour days, self-isolating from their families and putting themselves in harm’s way for the good of others,

we knew that any little bit could help,” says Aga Orlik, Tide North America Fabric Care vice president. “If we could take laundry off their list, it would buy them just those few extra minutes with family they so desperately sought.”

As of early June, Tide Cleaners stores in 27 cities had dry cleaned more than 527,000 garments and washed and folded over 377,000 pounds of laundry for more than 69,000 front-line workers.

### Sky Zone: It’s still party time

COVID-19 forced families everywhere to cancel or postpone events of all kinds: weddings, funerals, reunions, vacations. Also, birthday parties — more than 200,000 of which take place every year at Sky Zone, a chain of indoor trampoline parks with over 200 locations.

Although Sky Zone closed all of its parks in response to the pandemic, it wasn’t so quick to cancel the celebra-

tions for which it’s known. Instead, it decided to rethink them. On April 1, the company began offering cost- and stress-free virtual birthday parties.

Sky Zone handles all the details. It creates a customized invite that parents can forward to guests, for example, and provides virtual party hosts who facilitate interactive activities like scavenger hunts and Tik Tok dance lessons. Birthday kids also receive a pass for a free jump at their local Sky Zone when it reopens, not to mention a virtual “Happy Birthday” serenade.

“Every child deserves a birthday party that makes them feel celebrated, even when they’re stuck at home,” says Fernando Eiroa, CEO of Sky Zone parent company CircusTrix. As of June, he noted, Sky Zone had hosted more than 3,000 virtual birthday parties for children around the world.

Continued on page 28



## AMERICA RESPONDS



DispatchHealth workers brought food along with medical care. DISPATCHHEALTH

Continued from page 26

### DispatchHealth: Bringing food, too

If any business were tailor-made for a pandemic-stricken world, it might be DispatchHealth, which provides on-demand in-home health care to patients in more than 19 cities with the goal of reducing unnecessary emergency room visits. By treating minor injuries and illnesses at home, it has kept scared and vulnerable patients out of overburdened hospitals where they might have been exposed to COVID-19.

When cities and states began issuing stay-at-home orders, DispatchHealth realized it was in a position to provide not just health care, but also groceries.

"We wanted to be able to do more than treat (patients) from a medical perspective," says Mark Prather, the company's co-founder and CEO. "Providers were noticing that some patients — especially the elderly — were running low on food and didn't feel safe leaving their homes during quarantine. After reaching out to partners and food banks across the U.S., we were able to collect enough food donations to put together bags of groceries that could be left with patients in need."

As of June 1, DispatchHealth had donated more than 4,000 pounds of food to vulnerable patients, and more than \$10,000 to local food banks.

### IKEA: Essentials by the truckload

Responding to a health care emergency like COVID-19 requires doctors and nurses, not to mention medical equipment, from masks, gloves and gowns to ventilators and vital signs monitors. But it also requires items more commonly



An IKEA store in Centennial, Colorado, filled a truck with items for A Precious Child, which helps at-risk children. IKEA

thought of as creature comforts. That's why IKEA has donated \$1.6 million worth of home furnishings and products to coronavirus relief efforts, including blankets, bedding and storage items for blood drives, temporary hospitals and shelters.

Of that amount, IKEA donated \$1 million worth to the American Red Cross, state health departments and local nonprofits. The remaining \$600,000 of its contribution went toward individuals experiencing homelessness.

"During this time, it is difficult for homeless shelters to abide by social distancing guidelines. Many shelters are at capacity and looking at alternative locations to house individuals and families that were already homeless or recently displaced as a result of COVID-19," says Javier Quiñones, president of IKEA Retail U.S. "For instance, the city of New Haven (Connecticut) has been working hard to move some people from the shel-

ter into hotels. These individuals are moving into empty apartments and IKEA New Haven worked with homeless shelter staff to provide key home essentials for 30 units that include kitchen tables and chairs, pots and pans, dressers, bed frames and mattresses, sheet sets, bed pillows, bath towels and bathmats."

To date, IKEA has donated 147,513 products that have helped approximately 83,000 people.

### Hilton: 'Home' for health workers

With travel at a standstill, the hospitality industry has been ravaged by the coronavirus. But instead of asking for help, some hoteliers mobilized quickly to give it. Hilton, for example, volunteered to house medical workers who deployed to COVID-19 hotspots around the country to assist with providing health care.

From April 13 to May 31, Hilton part-

nered with American Express to donate more than 1 million free room nights at approximately 3,000 hotels to front-line medical professionals who needed a safe place to sleep, recharge or isolate from their families to avoid potentially exposing them to the virus.

A third partner, World Central Kitchen, helped provide nearly 30,000 free, fresh meals to sustain health care workers during their stay.

"Medical professionals have been working in the most challenging conditions while sacrificing their own needs for the greater good. They represent the best of who we are, and it was important for us to do our part in taking care of them," says Danny Hughes, Hilton executive vice president and president of the Americas. "We wanted to be their home away from home during this time."

Continued on page 30

## AMERICA RESPONDS



Republic Services gave workers free meals and gift cards. REPUBLIC SERVICES

Continued from page 28

### Republic Services: Haul of fame

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it sometimes felt as if the world had stopped spinning. But life went on ... and so did the need for waste hauling.

While other companies shut their doors to wait for brighter days, waste services company Republic Services had to keep on trucking — literally. Residential trash and recyclable volumes surged due to stay-at-home orders, and the company's trucks averaged 5 million daily pickups in 41 states and Puerto Rico.

To thank its 28,000 front-line workers, Republic launched Committed to Serve, a \$20 million initiative to recognize its workforce while also supporting small businesses. As part of the eight-week effort, it provided a weekly meal to its employees at work and a take-home family meal on Fridays, all purchased from local restaurants.

It also distributed \$100 gift cards bi-weekly — a total of \$400 per front-line worker — and asked employees to spend the money with struggling small businesses. Finally, it made a \$3 million donation to its charitable foundation, which will award the money this summer to nonprofit partners for the purpose of revitalizing small businesses.

"We wanted to bring certainty and stability to our front-line employees and the communities we serve," says CEO Don Slager. "This initiative is targeted economic stimulus at the local level, designed to benefit our small business customers as well as our employees, our company and our country."



"People want to learn from experts about the changing world around them," says Coursera CEO Jeff Maggioncalda. COURSERA

### Vans: Footing the bill for friends

Vans, the shoe brand of choice for skateboarders and other hip crowds for over half a century, donated more than 24,000 pairs of shoes to volunteers working at food banks in COVID-19 hot-spots. It also donated more than 40,000 shoelaces to designer Michael Schmidt, who is using them to make 20,000 medical face shields to be donated to health care workers.

The highlight of the company's efforts, however, is Foot the Bill, a global initiative whose goal is supporting 160 COVID-stressed small businesses across the United States, Europe and Asia. Each business was invited to design a custom pair of shoes and a T-shirt for sale on Vans' website. Net proceeds from each sale go directly to the businesses, which include local skate shops, restaurants and music venues.

Nick Street, vice president of global integrated marketing, says, "As a brand ingrained in the belief that we aren't a shoe and apparel company but a people

company that makes shoes and apparel, looking after ... people has always been and will remain our top priority."

### Coursera: World has a lot to learn

COVID-19 has changed the way Americans work, socialize and shop. And also, the way they learn. Online education platform Coursera has responded with initiatives designed to make education more accessible to students and workers affected by the coronavirus.

In March, the company started its Campus Response Initiative, which gives any college or university affected by COVID-19 free access to the Coursera course catalog; by mid-June, it had launched more than 9,300 programs benefiting more than 1 million students. Also in March, it rolled out Coursera Together, offering free public access to a curated collection of courses covering everything from mental health to career development. That was followed in April by the Workforce Recovery Initiative, through which local, state and federal

governments worldwide can offer free access to job-relevant courses for unemployed workers. Finally, in June came Coursera for University Students, which offers free learning to undergraduate, graduate or recently graduated students.

Says CEO Jeff Maggioncalda. "Amidst uncertainty, people want to learn from experts about the changing world around them and how to cope."

### Lyft: More than just rides

Because they've spent the pandemic sheltering in place, many Americans have never needed transportation less. Others, however, have never needed it more. That's why rideshare company Lyft activated LyftUp, a social responsibility program through which it provides expanded transportation access to riders and communities in need.

Lyft so far has committed \$6.5 million to COVID-19 response efforts and donated tens of thousands of rides to those

Continued on page 32



## AMERICA RESPONDS

Continued from page 30

with essential transportation needs during the pandemic. Among its many efforts are a program to provide free transportation to survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence, many of who need help fleeing unsafe situations in which they're stuck during quarantine; free scooter rides and bikeshare memberships for critical workers to help them commute; on-demand delivery of meals, groceries and medical supplies to children and seniors in need; and a program to offer free or discounted rides to unemployed workers who need transportation to job interviews.

"Social impact has always been baked into our company DNA," says Lisa Boyd, Lyft's director of social impact, "and we are constantly thinking about how to use our company's unique superpower — the ability to provide access to transportation — to make an impact on the lives of people in need."

### Exelon: Unprecedented moves

When cities and states issued stay-at-home orders, the intention was to keep people safe. Unfortunately, not everyone's home is safe enough for sheltering in place. With that in mind, energy provider Exelon implemented policies designed to help 10 million customers in five states and the District of Columbia keep their lights on and their heat working during the pandemic.

First, it suspended all service disconnections and late fees through at least July 1. Then it reconnected at no cost thousands of customers whose service had been cut off within the past year.

"We've never done anything like this before," says Calvin Butler Jr., senior executive vice president for Exelon and CEO of Exelon Utilities. "We saw that our customers were suffering — businesses were closing, homeowners were losing their jobs, parents were being forced to stay home with kids — so the first thing we thought in mid-March was, 'What can we do to help?'"

### CommScope: Making connections

Network infrastructure company CommScope is in the business of connectivity. And in a world reshaped by COVID-19, where Zoom calls, remote working and online learning are routine, connectivity is more vital than ever.

Yet many Americans still lack internet



Lyft's Lisa Boyd says the company is always looking for ways to leverage its transportation "superpower" to help people. LYFT

**"When you see somebody's son or daughter talking to their teacher online and solving a problem, you know you're making a difference in their life. That feels incredible."**

**Morgan Kurk**  
CommScope executive

access — especially in rural areas.

To help families in underserved areas, CommScope, working through the nonprofit Information Technology Disaster Resource Center, began donating Wi-Fi and LTE access points to school districts so they could affix them along with antennas to school buses, creating make-shift mobile hot spots. Districts could then park buses near schools, in residential neighborhoods or in business districts for the purpose of providing free wireless internet to students and teachers engaged in distance learning, as well as parents working remotely.

"When you see somebody's son or

daughter talking to their teacher online and solving a problem, you know you're making a difference in their life," says Morgan Kurk, CommScope executive vice president and chief technology officer. "That feels incredible."

### Cigna, New York Life: For families

Among the terms that have entered the common lexicon during the pandemic is PPE, short for personal protective equipment. PPE is critical to protecting front-line health care workers — and there has been a marked shortage of it since the pandemic began. Without proper protection, hospital staff working to save lives are putting their own at risk.

And some have been lost.

Although they can't prevent occupational deaths from COVID-19, insurers Cigna and New York Life recognized that they could help those left behind. Their Brave of Heart fund will provide charitable relief grants to support the families of health care workers who die from the coronavirus.

Through their respective foundations, each company seeded the fund with an initial \$25 million and pledged to raise an

additional \$100 million from outside individuals and organizations. Additionally, New York Life will match the first \$25 million in individual contributions, while Cigna will provide free access to mental health and wellness resources for front-line health care workers experiencing fear, stress and anxiety as a result of COVID-19. Initial grants will total \$15,000 to cover immediate expenses, while follow-on grants will total up to \$60,000 for longer-term needs.

"When medical professionals and their support teams go to work on any given day, they generally don't expect to risk their lives," says Cigna president and CEO David Cordani. "And yet, some of those individuals are not only going to get COVID-19, but succumb to it and pass. We decided there needs to be some way of recognizing that level of service and selflessness."

Adds Ted Mathas, chairman and CEO of New York Life, "The pandemic calls for companies to dig deep and consider how they serve others. New York Life's mission is to provide people with financial security and peace of mind in uncertain times, so we're doing what we do best for the families of health care workers."