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Brokering a Better Community

For **TriSure Corp.**, weaving philanthropy, volunteerism, and community service is only part of the agenda

By Matt Alderton

The city of Raleigh, North Carolina, is a statistical superstar. Thanks to its high-quality schools, abundance of green space, wealth of amenities, and rapidly expanding economy, it was named the nation's top city for business by *Bloomberg Businessweek* in 2011, the number-one city for business and careers by *Forbes* magazine, also in 2011, and the best city for quality of life by Portfolio.com in 2010. And that's just the beginning.

Unfortunately, every growth spurt comes with growing pains, and Raleigh is certainly feeling its share, according to John Cramer, one of six partners at TriSure Corp., a Raleigh-based commercial-insurance brokerage. "This has been a very fast-growing, dynamic area for many, many years," Cramer says. "Because of all this growth, however, the cost of living here has gone up dramatically, and a lot of people have gotten left behind."

Founded in 1999 when two competing insurance firms merged, TriSure is doing its part to make Raleigh a happy, healthy place for everyone who lives there—not just those who read glossy business magazines—by weaving philanthropy, volunteerism, and community service into the fabric of its company culture. "Although we're in a very educated, affluent, fast-growing area, if you look behind the curtain, you'll see a lot of people struggling," Cramer explains. "That's been a major focus for us."

With 36 employees and clients in 46 states, TriSure is the Triangle region's largest privately owned commercial brokerage. When its founders decided to merge, however, their goal wasn't becoming the biggest. It was becoming the best. As such, their merger conversation quickly transcended legalese. "There were three of us who sat down in 1998 and 1999 to talk about a merger," Cramer recalls. "One day, we sat down and said, 'We ought to write down what our culture, vision, and philosophy is, then compare notes.'"

Each of them wrote down the three most important values for their merged company's culture; when they shared them, they found they'd written identical comments in the same order: Honesty and integrity; Superior customer service; and Is it the right financial decision? "We never discussed how big we would get or how much money we would make," Cramer says. "Our goal was to be the best we could be, with the best reputation. It made sense that if we did that, the rest would follow. And almost 13 years later, that's proven to be true."



Because employees share the founders' values, TriSure eventually began looking for ways to empower and activate its staff. The result was the TriSure community service program, which was launched in March 2010. "We wanted to do more than talk about being a company that's active in the community," Cramer says. "We wanted to put our money where our mouth was. So, every full-time employee here has 40 hours a year, discretionary, that they're paid in addition to sick days and vacation time to go out and be active in the community. We logged roughly 228 hours in the first nine months we did it, and so far, year-to-date, we've done 436 hours."

Employees can donate their time to virtually any cause, charity, or nonprofit they care about. They simply submit out a half-sheet of paper stating what they want to do and when they want to do it. What the employees donate in time, TriSure often matches with money. "We encourage our employees to come to us if there's something they want us to support," Cramer says. "They'll ask us to sponsor this or that—to give a little here or give a little there—and we seldom if ever say no."

To date, TriSure has supported more than 35 different charities and nonprofits that provide programs, food, shelter, education, special needs, and healing in the Triangle region. Among them: the Arthritis Foundation, Boy Scouts of America, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, The First Tee, Fostering Bright Futures, the Friends of Wake County Guardian ad Litem Program, Habitat for Humanity, Horse and Buddy, The Miracle League, StepUP Ministry, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Susan G. Komen for the Cure. "If our employees are involved in it and feel passionate about it, we're going to support it," Cramer says.

Although companies that give often receive, TriSure isn't motivated by gain. It's motivated by gratitude. "We all feel very fortunate to do what we do and to have a successful business," Cramer says. "We do this because it's the right thing to do."

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