



# The Gift of Kindness

***Storage owners and vendors demonstrate that being charitable can be a year-round endeavor.***

*By John Dunlap*

The holiday season is upon us, and this is traditionally the time of year when we speak glowingly of the need to help those less fortunate than ourselves. But for a number of people in self storage, the spirit of giving takes a real and tangible form all year.

Brian Caster, Melissa Emert and Compass Self Storage are making not only this holiday season but the whole year brighter for many, many people in their communities and regions on a daily basis.

They not only give to others out of the kindness of their hearts, but because they simply think it is the right thing to do. Some were brought up that way, others see it as a chance for all their facilities to get excited about a good cause, and still others realize that getting behind a good cause can only help the way they are perceived in their community.

## Serving Hands

As far as Brian Caster is concerned, helping the needy isn't just a holiday tradition—it is a year-round mission. Caster, his family and the A-1 Self Storage business—of which he

is the CEO—make a point of engaging in philanthropic and humanitarian enterprises in and around their San Diego, California, headquarters.

For Caster, that need is basically part of his upbringing. His parents, Barbara and Terry Caster, started the non-profit Serving Hands International 30 years ago in an effort to help those in need in nearby Mexico (the program now extends worldwide).



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***“... both my parents grew up very poor, so they understand how a helping hand lifted their spirits and their families.”***

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*~ Brian Caster*

“My mother and father started and still run the 501(c)3, along with the Caster Family Foundation,” said Brian. “Several things have shaped their giving: first is our faith, so this desire to help the poor springs from this belief and faith; secondly, both my parents grew up very poor, so they understand how a helping hand lifted their spirits

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*Compass Self Storage participates in the “Light the Night Walk” to benefit The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.*

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### Client Need:

Located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Secure Choice Storage is a traditional self storage company with three locations. The city of Prince Albert is populated by 35,000 and in a 50km radius the region is home to more than 150,000. After researching the market, owner and operator Ken McAuley recognized an opportunity for a portable storage firm to service the regional market.

Ken wanted to find a simple, straightforward solution to get into the portable storage business. He compared the quality, cost, available features and customer service with many portable container manufacturers and decided that USC was the best at helping him to start small and grow his portable storage business.

### USC Solution:

Because of its durability, USC's Z-Box® container and wheels were perfect to handle the northern Canadian weather. Because USC can ship in groups of 12 at a time, Ken was able to start to grow his business with a manageable initial order quantity. Ken liked that USC had more features on the Z-Box® than alternative suppliers and the USC price was the most competitive.

### Client Testimonial

*"We have recently added the USC containers to our storage site mix of units. The ease of setting up of the USC containers and the attractive design impresses our customers and we have had numerous positive comments from our customers. The personal service and quick response to our enquires by USC is also greatly appreciated."*

*Kenton McAuley, Owner*

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and their families. They never forgot that feeling and the people who helped them.”

Among other things, Serving Hands provides more than 100,000 nutritious meals to people in need in Baja California, Mexico. In the last five, the group provided more than 100 modular classrooms to the poorest parts of Tijuana (donated by U.S. organizations and municipal districts), provided medical aid to more than 5,000 people in the Baja California border region, and built more than 250 homes for those in need.

A-1 Self Storage has more than 42 locations, and all of them are part of humanitarian (and ecological) efforts to better the planet. It offers its facilities as a drop-off place for people wanting to do e-waste recycling (partnering with GREENspotDROPoff). But perhaps more importantly, through A-1 and the Casters, all the Serving Hands overhead expenses are taken care of so 100 percent of all money donated to SHI goes to the people that the organization supports.

**Doing Their Best for the LLS**

It is nice to be able to raise money for a good cause, but even better when the fundraising turns into a fun event in which your own employees compete to see who can top the list as the best at bringing in the bucks.



*“Raising money for LLS keeps us grounded with the realization that there is more to life than what we do.”*

*~ Ed Hainrihar*

For the folks at Compass Self Storage, a division of Amsdell Companies, raising money for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) is a yearly pleasure. It’s also great for LLS, as Compass facilities annually raise \$15,000 to \$20,000 to assist in fighting blood cancers.

“We picked the LLS as a charity to support because they have a really great record of putting the majority of what they raise into treatment and patient care,” said Ed Hainrihar, vice president of operations for Compass/Amsdell. “Only 22 percent of their funds go to office expenses while 78 percent go directly to patients and research.”

It all started in the late 1990s with a regatta in Cleveland as the primary local fundraiser for LLS, but then Compass facility managers took hold of it and began to have fun while raising money for the cause. Stores competed with each other by using tie-ins to promotions like half-off a first month’s rent with any donation to the LLS. The competition grew and a Stanley Cup-like trophy would go

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to the top fundraising facility, which it would keep for the entire year until a new winner was crowned.

“Now we have a Light the Night Walk in Cleveland and many other areas across the country in which lighted balloons represent those who have survived leukemia and lymphoma, as well honoring those who have passed away,” added Hainrihar. “Raising money for LLS keeps us grounded with the realization that there is more to life than what we do. We have even found that people like to do business with a company that gives back.”

Over the years since Compass/Amsdell began raising money, Hainrihar figures that his company has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for LLS.

Local Heroes

Raising money primarily for local charities is an ongoing passion for facility manager Melissa Emert and assistant manager David Moore of East Cherokee Storage in Woodstock, Georgia. As a result, the Woodstock community is well aware of their efforts.

“People actually store with us because they’ve heard about our auctions for charity and how much it means to the people of our community,” said Emert. “We literally raise thousands of dollars every year and give them to organizations like Operation Smile, the local Cherokee Co. Fire



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~ Melissa Emert

Department “Explorer” program, the Cherokee Co. Sheriff’s K9 Department, the Woodstock Police Department’s “Shop with a Hero” program, Leaving Tracks (a greyhound rescue organization), the Georgia Burn Foundation and many more.”

In essence, Emert ties her charity auctions in with regular auctions on the property. Special items are donated to the charity auctions by those who store with East Cherokee or others in the local community. She’s had pianos, desks, chairs and even a 100-year old butcher’s block donated to sell.

“We usually raise a couple hundred dollars for a charity at each auction,” concluded Emert. “For items that we can’t sell, we call the local charity pickup trucks that come to select items for their stores that support their charitable organizations. We have called the American Thrift Shop that supports families in distress and the Kidney Foundation that supports people with kidney disease.” ❖

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