



MNM+E Editor Bobby Hart and Digital Content Editor Julianna Fazio work to put a bike together at CSR Central during MPI's 2014 WEC.

Minneapolis Raises the CSR Bar

BUILDING A BIKE IS NOTHING LIKE RIDING A BIKE. For a guy who has trouble completing a Lego set, even the easiest instructions and ready-to-assemble parts don't comprehend when connecting wheels to a frame. And the fact that I managed to somehow piece a bike together—with a massive amount of help from Digital Content Editor Julianna Fazio and an extremely patient metroConnections employee—doesn't mean I could do it again.

But if the effort resulted in benefitting kids in need—the bikes were donated to Washburn Center for Children—I'd at least have to try. That's the appeal of corporate social responsibility (CSR), the continuing commitment by a business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life for others. And at the Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC) on August 4, as part of MPI's 2014 Word Education Congress (WEC), there were plenty of opportunities to not only help others, but have some fun doing so.

Think about it: What are the top reasons you wouldn't participate in CSR? The practical answers: no time and/or no interest in the activity. So Meet Minneapolis and MPI collaborated on a concept that eliminated those two excuses. The MCC's ballroom hosted an all-day activity hub, allowing attendees to participate in six different activities (benefitting eight organizations) for as much time as they had. CSR Central was born, and with help from metroConnections, it was flawlessly executed. (Read more on CSR Central on page 22 and see WEC photos on page 62.) And that shouldn't come as much of a surprise, considering the host city's culture and reputation. The Twin Cities have the most volunteers per capita of any major metro region, with a nation's best 36.7 percent of residents volunteering, according to Volunteering and Civic Life in America.

Not only was CSR Central a hit, but WEC as a whole made waves, thanks in a large part to its host city. During the four-day conference, Minneapolis displayed to 1,900-plus attendees the features that help make Minnesota a red-hot meetings and events hub, including food trucks (page 36), breweries (page 28), highly regarded hotel restaurants (page 24) and event entertainment of all kinds (page 44). The event brought an estimated economic benefit of \$5 million to the area, \$245,000 in local tax revenue and supported 1,000 jobs, according to Meet Minneapolis. MPI Foundation raised more than \$170,000, a record for most money raised at an MPI conference. And thanks to CSR Central, the event and city gave plenty back to local organizations. But for Minneapolis, giving back isn't complicated. It's just like riding a bike.

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GIVING BACK»

CSR CENTRAL SETS THE STANDARD

MPI, Meet Minneapolis and metroConnections collaborate to take corporate social responsibility to the next level at WEC.

BY BOBBY HART

AS HOST CITY of the 2014 World Education Congress (WEC), Minneapolis was on full display August 2-5. And in the heart of this display, smack dab in the middle of the bustling Minneapolis Convention Center, the term corporate social responsibility (CSR) was redefined in true Twin-Cities style.

After all, there was a reputation at stake. Minneapolis/Saint Paul has the most volunteers per capita of any major metro region, with 36.7 percent of residents volunteering, equating to 97.6 million total volunteer hours, according to Volunteering and Civic Life in America.

“Recognizing the strong tradition Minneapolis has in volunteerism and philanthropy, we wanted to do something perhaps beyond the usual afternoon off-site park cleanup, house-painting type of activity,” says Sports Minneapolis Executive Director Scott Romane, one of the co-chairs of the MPI CSR Committee. “And ideally we wanted to try and engage as many attendees as possible so they could be part of that tradition of Minneapolis volunteerism.”

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The end result was CSR Central, an all-day giving back haven: Six different volunteer activities, benefitting eight different local charities, were available in the ballroom August 4. The different activities were designed to accommodate a variety of attendee interests and schedules. Attendees could build trikes and race them through an obstacle course for Washburn Center for Children; pack backpacks and take a fifth-grade quiz in subjects including math, science and spelling for Minneapolis Public Schools; sort canned food and play Plinko for Matter, Second Harvest Heartland and The Food Group (formerly Emergency Foodshelf Network); build and paint furniture for Bridging; pack hygiene kits for Simpson Housing Services; and tie fleece blankets for Project Linus.

This all-day, multiple-activity/charity structure was the fruits of a collaborative effort between Meet Minneapolis, MPI's CSR Committee, metroConnections, which executed the event, and several local sponsors.

Romane says the goal of CSR Central was "to provide meeting professionals in attendance some ideas of different ways that they can activate corporate social responsibility within their programs."

The attendee response to the new structure was overwhelmingly positive. "[CSR Central provides] a good opportunity to participate in multiple organizations within the Twin Cities," says attendee Sarah McElfresh, catering sales manager at Minneapolis Marriot Northwest. "Instead of just focusing on one, you get to focus on eight charities."

When all was said and done, there was 927 cans of food sorted, 500 hygiene kits assembled, 96 backpacks stuffed, 85 blankets tied, 16 bikes built, 15 pieces of furniture painted and eight local organizations impacted.

"Within the world of MPI, there is a saying that 'when we meet, we change the world,'" Romane says. "And by allowing attendees to engage in activities like CSR, it definitely allows them to change the world here in Minneapolis." 🍷



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