

# At TouchNet in Lenexa, employees working together for a cause find a feeling of connection.

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Special to The Star.

Kansas City, KS - Hurricane Katrina sent a wave of compassion through TouchNet, a Lenexa-based company providing e-commerce solutions for higher education.

Dan Toughey, president of TouchNet, called Olathe's Heart to Heart International, and soon TouchNet employees were unloading trucks, sorting donations and assembling care kits at a Kansas City, Kan., warehouse.

They did it on company time, but with the promise they would each make up for half of the time they were away from the office. "The concept was 'We'll give ' half, you give half,'

And it continues. Six days each year, TouchNet sends 10 to 15 employees to the warehouse. By the end of 2007, 99 percent of the company's nearly 100 employees will have worked one day there, he said.

"Our people have a whole different view when they come back from working there," Toughey said. "They've worked alongside a mix (of people) from several different departments — people they don't have a chance to interact with on a day-to-day basis.

"And it becomes a team-building, bonding experience."

They also are motivated to become better employees because of that feeling of working together for a cause, Toughey said.

"They feel more connected."

The benefits to the company by way of positively charged employees is not lost on the Points of Light Foundation Center & Volunteer National Network, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. A 2006 survey by the foundation found that 56 percent of



Thirteen employees of TouchNet, including Tina Pinneo, sorted medical supplies at Heart to Heart International's global distribution center in Kansas City, Kan.

Americans think workplace volunteer programs improve employee morale.

Other surveys substantiate that employees who work for organizations involved in the community:

- Are more likely to be engaged at work and to stay with that company (2003 report, by Walker Information).
- Have increased teamwork skills (61 percent, according to Barclays Bank).

"There's added value to a company whose employees are making a difference," said Pat Cundiff, vice president of direct services for the United Way of Greater Kansas City.

Getting started

To find out how to initiate and manage an employee volunteer program, visit [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org) and click on Our Networks.

For organizations specific to Kansas City, visit [www.unitedwaygkc.org](http://www.unitedwaygkc.org) and click on Volunteering, or call Jennifer Mikulich, manager of the United Way Volunteer Center, at 816-559-4667.