



Michigan Sugar Company

Association of Fundraising Professionals-Mid Michigan Chapter

National Philanthropy Day Luncheon

Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2018

Apple Mountain Conference Center, Freeland

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Making Life a Little Sweeter

At Michigan Sugar Company, we like to say we've been making life sweeter for folks like you since 1906.

Now, that's an easy thing to say, especially when you consider we make about 1.2 billion pounds of sugar every year.

But at Michigan Sugar Company, we understand and appreciate that while our sweetness is typically associated with white granulated, brown and powdered sugar, it also must incorporate a passion for giving, building our communities and setting strong examples of philanthropic leadership.

Good afternoon, my name is Rob Clark and I am proud to work as the Director of Communications and Community Relations for Michigan Sugar Company.

On behalf of the entire Michigan Sugar family, I want to thank the Association of Fundraising Professionals-Mid Michigan Chapter for honoring Michigan Sugar Company with the 2018 Outstanding Corporation Award.

It is humbling to join the list of past recipients, including last year's winner, Nexteer Automotive; our good friends at Hausbeck Pickle Company, honored in 2014; and, of course, Monitor Sugar Company, which received the award in 2004 shortly before merging with Michigan Sugar Company to build the cooperative that continues today.

Over the years, Michigan Sugar Company's philanthropic efforts have enriched people's lives and made our communities better places to live, work and play.

Let me give you just a few examples:

When the Mid-Michigan Children's Museum was being developed a decade ago in Saginaw, Michigan Sugar was there to help create the Aunt Sugar's Farm exhibit. A decade later, along with our partner Hausbeck Pickle Co., we're looking at new ways we can enhance that exhibit and make it a more enjoyable space for kids.

When we sat down a few years ago with the incredible team at the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, we were able to reach a land management deal that led to the creation of the Michigan Sugar Trails on Middlegrounds Island in Bay City. Our land was turned into an incredible grid of trails perfect for biking and hiking. This past summer, Michigan Sugar employees teamed up with SBLC staff members for a day of sprucing up those trails to make them even better.

And, just a few months ago, Michigan Sugar Company made the historic announcement that it has stepped up as the Port Sponsor for the 2019 Tall Ship Celebration: Bay City, a tri-annual event that literally brings the world – and a fleet of about a dozen tall ships – to the Great Lakes Bay Region. We look forward to welcoming you all to Bay City July 18-21.

These are a few of the more high-profile projects Michigan Sugar Company, its grower-owners and its employees have stamped their name on.

But in the world of corporate philanthropy, it's sometimes the smallest gestures that mean the most:

Like donating the use of a cotton candy machine to the Girl Scouts, or a church group or a school holding a student carnival.

Or providing coloring books for youth taking part in the Michigan Farm Bureau's annual Rural Education Day known as Project RED.

Or helping to sponsor a community event, something Michigan Sugar does just about every month.

Just last week, we were proud to serve as a Torte Sponsor for the Delta College Foundation's annual Chocolate Affair fundraiser. Like many events we sponsor, our commitment went beyond simply writing a check. In this case, Michigan Sugar Company President and CEO Mark Flegenheimer and his wife Anne served as the honorary Chocolate Affair chairs for Saginaw County.

We are proud that our blueprint for giving starts at the top and encompasses each and every one of our 850 year-round and 1,300 seasonal employees.

We are also proud that blueprint is built on a desire to constantly assess whether our strategic partnerships can somehow better the lives of others.

Take for example, the Michigan Sugar Home Runs program launched this past season with the Great Lakes Loons. Not your ordinary corporate sponsorship, we designed this one to benefit those less fortunate. Each time the Loons hit a home run either on the road or at Dow Diamond, Michigan Sugar donated 10 pounds of sugar to Hidden Harvest, a food rescue and redistribution agency based in Saginaw. When all was said and done, we donated 1,000 pounds of sugar.

On the back of that successful program, we built a new partnership with the Saginaw Spirit this season called the Sweet Shot of the Game. During each of the Spirits' 34 home games, Michigan Sugar Company is donating 25 pounds of sugar to Rescue Ministries of Mid-Michigan, which operates the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission in Bay City and the City Rescue Mission in Saginaw.

Sugar donations are nothing new to Michigan Sugar Company. We've been donating tens of thousands of pounds of sugar to good causes each year for decades.

Just last month, we partnered with the United Way of Bay County to distribute 22,800 pounds of white granulated sugar to 57 food pantries in Arenac, Bay, Midland, Saginaw and Tuscola counties.

And every week, our sugar is helping fuel fundraisers, like peanut brittle and apple pie sales conducted by athletic booster clubs, churches and service organizations; fill the cupboards at schools for young culinary students and provide an important baking staple in holiday gift baskets.

In total, Michigan Sugar donates about 85,000 pounds of sugar to good causes each year.

I mentioned the United Way, so it is important that I take a minute to speak a bit more about that organization.

Just this week, Michigan Sugar Company launched its internal United Way campaign to raise money that will support the programs of United Way partner agencies. This money is critical to funding the operations of organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Great Lakes Bay Region, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the American Red Cross, Bay Area Women's Center and Habitat for Humanity, among others.

It is humbling that Mark Flegenheimer, our President and CEO, was asked to give his testimonial about the importance of community building through personal and corporate giving as part of the 2018 United Way of Bay County official campaign video. I encourage you to check that out. It's posted on our company Facebook page and you can also find it on the United Way of Bay County's website.

Michigan Sugar Company also strongly encourages all businesses in the Great Lakes Bay Region to get involved in helping United Way and so many partner agencies.

Together, our collective giving can literally change lives.

As many of you know, Michigan Sugar Company has a footprint that extends beyond the Great Lakes Bay Region. Our factories in Caro, Crowell and Sebewaing have been a vital part of the Thumb economy for more than a century. And you'll find us also making a difference in those communities, through our annual sponsorships of the Michigan Sugar Festival in Sebewaing, Pioneer Days in Crowell and the Tuscola County Pumpkin Festival in Caro.

You'll find us each year at the county fairs in Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola counties, as well as those in Bay, Midland and Saginaw counties.

And, you'll see the Michigan Sugar float, carrying the Michigan Sugar Queen scholarship recipients, at parades throughout the region. Our next stops are the Sebewaing Holiday Lighted Parade on Nov. 17 and the Croswell Christmas Parade on Nov. 24.

I want to close today with a couple snippets from "Thank-you" letters we receive at Michigan Sugar Company every week. I keep them in an overflowing folder on my desk and they serve as a reminder that our efforts have a real impact on real people.

Here's one from the Hale County Quilters:

"We would like to thank your company for the donation of sugar, which we used for gift baskets. Money earned from baskets helps us to be able to make quilts for the baby pantry, teach eighth-graders to quilt and make quilts for veterans."

And here's another from New Life Christian Academy in Kimball, Michigan:

"We would like to offer our warmest thanks for Michigan Sugar Company's donation of sugar for our annual Apple Pie Sale. Because of your contribution, we will be able to keep the cost of making the pies to a minimum and raise the funds needed to help our general budget for the school year.

And finally, one from the Sanford United Methodist Women:

"Without your help we wouldn't be able to make our project as successful. The money we earn is used at the end of the year to help many organizations in our area and around the world. In today's economy, the help we can give to others is greatly appreciated. Know that you have helped in this endeavor."

Indeed, at Michigan Sugar Company, we like to say we've been making life sweeter since 1906.

It never ceases to amaze me how far a little sugar – a touch of sweetness – can go.

Again, on behalf of the entire family at Michigan Sugar Company, thank you for this tremendous honor and the opportunity to share our story with you today.

Thank you.