



V3's Vision of Volunteerism

The firm and its employees are passionate about making an impact and building lasting relationships

BY MICHELE MEYER

"Visio, vertere, virtute." That Latin phrase means "the vision to transform with excellence," and it's what inspired V3 Companies' name. "That's who we are," says Greg Wolterstorff, vice president of innovation and process, who has been with the firm for 27 years. "It addresses how we approach not only our work but also our volunteerism and community impact."

Case in point: The Conservation Foundation's annual volunteer day. Forty employees from V3, the Chicago-headquartered ACEC member firm, got right to work. The team unloaded pickup trucks filled with brush cutters, chainsaws, hard hats, safety goggles, and vests to help clear invasive brush and trees from sensitive habitat areas.

"V3 goes far beyond other volunteers," says Renae Frigo, land stewardship manager at The Conservation Foundation, a nonprofit land trust in Naperville, Illinois. "What they did for us would have cost us thousands if we'd hired someone."

The Conservation Foundation respects V3's volunteerism efforts so much that it reserves the most challenging projects for them—an approach also taken by other recipients of the firm's altruism.

V3's verve for volunteering is modeled on the company's mission statement: to deliver excellence while focusing on principles and people over short-term profits. That guiding philosophy has paid off. Even as the firm has swelled over 41 years from two to 400 workers and added regional offices and services, its core values have stayed consistent.

In 1997, Site Development and Infrastructure (SDI) founder Rob Petroelje renamed his firm V3 after "visio, vertere, virtute," meaning "the vision to transform with excellence." He was inspired after getting these Latin words and translation from a local high school teacher.

FUELED BY EMPLOYEES

Lou Gallucci, president and CEO of V3, led the drive in 2015 to formalize the firm's V3 Social Responsibility (VSR) program "so we could coordinate our efforts with greater effect."

V3 then chose five partners to volunteer with: The Conservation Foundation, the ACE Mentor Program, Centennial Volunteers, Engineers Without Borders USA, and DuPage Habitat for Humanity.

Since then, the list has more than doubled. Most of the non-profits are linked to the environment, including Veterans Bridge



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PRESIDENT AND CEO, V3**



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VICE PRESIDENT OF INNOVATION
AND PROCESS, V3**

Home, Licking County River Round Up, Friends of the White River, and the Parks Alliance of Indianapolis. Other opportunities involve clothing and food drives.

The program is built on volunteer time off, and about 30 percent of employees participate. "Leadership may have started it, but employees fuel it," Gallucci says.

Each full-time staffer receives eight hours of paid volunteer time off yearly, and each part-timer gets four hours. Extra hours are allowed for some projects, including those out of the country.

On an Engineers Without Borders team, Gallucci went to Honduras four times to help build a potable water system for an economically disadvantaged community.

Leadership works in the trenches with other employees. "We work shoulder to shoulder under the direction of young staff members," Gallucci says. "There's role reversal when it comes to volunteering."

An 18-member committee chaired by Katie LaSalle, V3's communications specialist, meets quarterly to discuss goals, events, and ways to entice participants. Activities are promoted on the firm's website and internally by a V3 liaison who consults nonprofit partners about their needs.

In 2023, major initiatives involved removing tires, toxin-filled drums, and even mattresses from rivers in Indianapolis and

Columbus, Ohio. Additionally, V3 teams cleared invasive species that were threatening a nature preserve in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Belrose Farm in the Chicago area.

Last year, V3 donated \$28,969 in labor, in the form of 690 hours of paid volunteer time. Another \$11,500 was budgeted for donations, materials, supplies, and meals, "and anything that has to do with events, but not hours and wages," LaSalle says.

While V3 does donate dollars, "we believe our main contribution is the time we dedicate," she adds.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

The culture of putting in extra effort comes from the top. "Rob was raised on a farm with servant leadership and a philanthropic heart," Wolterstorff says. "We approach philanthropy as we do our job—transform with excellence."

V3 has proven its long-term dedication to the communities it serves, says Linda Nicodemus, stormwater manager at Licking County Soil & Water Conservation Management and formerly an employee of the Village of Hebron in Ohio, where V3 has helped to manage flood control. "That's why they've been Hebron's go-to for more than 30 years," she adds.

"We assign them the most challenging sections, because if it can come out, they'll get it out—including a waterlogged couch, shopping carts, and tractor tires," Nicodemus says. "Other volunteers use buckets. V3 uses teamwork."

But the firm's generosity extends beyond such tasks.

Since Nicodemus' role involves stormwater, Stephen Kopechek, a project manager at V3, "would clarify or explain any changes to the regulations—at no charge," she says. And engineers also showed up at city council meetings, unasked, to explain her needs.

Similarly, Scott Salmon, executive director of Friends of the White River, benefits from V3's thoroughness. When the nonprofit needs to justify project costs, such as restoring an eroded stream bank, "other engineering firms usually give one page of what's feasible," he says. "But V3's quotes tend to be seven pages, including two pages of invaluable visuals."



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**SCOTT SALMON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FRIENDS OF THE WHITE RIVER**

Then, at twice yearly cleanups of illegal dumping sites, "They send a sizable contingent—and are in the mud with us," Salmon says.

V3 also has adopted a three-mile stretch of the DuPage River near Chicago, with eight to 15 volunteers showing up in waders—and meaning business.

"It's incredibly important to remove metal, plastic, and other trash from the river and its banks," says Wolterstorff. "Garbage degrades water quality and can trap animals. We pull 400 to 1,000 pounds of junk each time."

A LASTING CONNECTION

Volunteers often build long-term relationships with the groups they aid. Each organization works with the same V3 liaison year after year, developing a deeper bond.

The Conservation Foundation's V3 liaison is Keith Jones, a senior project manager and ecologist at the firm. Frigo marvels at his efficiency, which spares her staff extra work and worry. "It's amazing how much gets done in one day."

And his enthusiasm is infectious. Jones is "lighthearted and makes it fun," she adds. "He often grills lunch over a fire of the brush pile we've created."

In addition to cultivating a passion for the organizations it helps, the VSR program fosters a sense of unity among team members who may otherwise never have the chance to meet or collaborate.

"It's not just about the volunteer work. It's about bonding and gaining new respect for those with different talents, all while having fun," Wolterstorff says. ■

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**RENAE FRIGO
LAND STEWARDSHIP MANAGER
THE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION**

4 Ways to Build Better Volunteerism

1 LEAD THE WAY.

"Leadership must be passionate about it and support it," says V3's Katie LaSalle. "If passion is there, it will be successful."

2 USE YOUR TALENTS.

Seek volunteer opportunities that encourage team building, offer training opportunities, and align with who you are as an organization and with your workers' skill sets.

3 ENCOURAGE MORE ENGAGEMENT.

"Once employees participate in an event, they tend to keep coming back," says V3's Greg Wolterstorff.

4 STICK WITH YOUR PARTNERS.

"You build relationships and deliver more service if you continue to represent the same ones," Wolterstorff says.

