

the **gift**  of giving

EDWARDS LIFESCIENCES

Competition, fun keep employees giving

By the numbers

\$20 million: United Way's 2014-15 local fundraising goal.

\$1.4 million and \$575,000:

Amount donated by Western Digital and Pacific Life Insurance Co., respectively, to last year's campaign.

\$8 million: Total charitable investments expected from Edwards Lifesciences and its foundation in 2014.

\$235,000: Amount in 2014 that Edwards Lifesciences Foundation provided to Patient Advocate Foundation's Heart Valve Financial Aid Fund and CareLine, which distributes grants to people who need new valve care but can't afford it.

59 percent: Hike in companies that increased their giving between 2007 and 2012.

70 percent: Proportion of American workers who are "not engaged" or "actively disengaged," making them less likely to be productive, according to the 2013 Gallup "State of the American Workplace" survey.

Source: Edwards Lifesciences, United Way Orange County, The Conference Board and Gallup

A matching system and company events spark high commitment level at heart-valve maker.

BY LONDON HALL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Willie Du, a research and development engineer at Edwards Lifesciences, had just completed the annual 5K Heart Walk put on by the Orange County chapter of the American Heart Association, and he lined up for the ritual team photo.

The line grew longer and longer. Du thought he'd be one of the last employees in line, but he turned out to be in the middle. When everyone was assembled in place, the photographer had to fit in some 800 people.

"I'm sure I was just a dot in a photo," he said.

At Edwards, the Irvine-based maker of artificial heart valves, community service is ingrained into the corporate culture. Companywide, about 70 percent of employees have engaged in some kind of philanthropy in the previous year, donating either money or their time to causes.

At the Irvine headquarters, that participation rate is 86 percent among the 2,500 employees, says Amanda Fowler, executive director of global corporate giving.

"Certainly we are a very competitive group of people, and we'd like to see that number be 100 percent," Fowler said.

Orange County United Way kicked off its 2014-15 fundraising campaign in September, taking the time to salute the local companies that had gone the extra mile for the group's new FACE 2024 (Fund, Advocate, Collaborate and Educate) program, which will seek, among other goals, to cut the Orange County high-school dropout rate in half. Edwards won an award for the greatest year-over-year increase in giving among UW's corporate partners in O.C., elevating the company's donations from \$230,000 to \$370,000.

"A big part of how that happened, and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EDWARDS LIFESCIENCES

About 800 Edwards Lifesciences employees turned out for the American Heart Association's 5K Heart Walk in March.



Stan Rowe, usually chief scientific officer, was chief body slammer at a sumo wrestling match designed to rally his team to participate in the 2013 United Way campaign.

what other companies also do to incentivize employees to give, is they match the contributions of their employees' commitment," said Brie Griset Smith, vice president of development at Orange County United Way. "That really excites the employees, and it's a great way to show that their company is committed to the community in which their employees live and work."

Edwards instituted its matching system

during the 2013-14 UW fundraising campaign, and for this next year its goal is to raise a half-million dollars between its Irvine, Utah and Puerto Rico offices, while increasing the number of employee participants from 1,100 to 1,200.

"Competition is huge around here," Du said.

Du, 27, grew up in Orlando, Fla., and went to school at Duke University, going to work for Edwards right out of college, in 2010. Getting involved in company community-service efforts was a way for him to meet his new colleagues and learn more about Southern California. He eventually became a team leader for the Heart Walk, and learned about the many projects United Way undertakes.

"It was actually the first time I found out we have people living below the poverty line in Orange County," he said. "To be perfectly honest, when I moved out here I got an apartment in Irvine, I'm driving around, and everything's perfectly manicured and beautiful. I totally just assumed, 'Oh yeah, Orange County's pretty much like paradise, right?' And then we start hearing about how many folks in O.C. are probably just miles away and not doing so

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great.”

One of the company’s events to encourage employee involvement in charity was a basketball tournament, with the championship round pitting employees against executive management. Teams had to pledge money to Edwards’ United Way campaign to even get into the tournament, and on championship day, the employees’ ticket to the game counted as their pledge receipt.

“That was a spectacular, fun event,” said Larry Wood, 48, corporate vice president of the company’s Transcatheter Heart Valves division. “It’s like a very sophisticated dunk tank. The basketball game has taken it to a whole new level. It’s 4-on-4 basketball, against these 27-year-old gazelles that run up and down the court.”

Wood speaks to local high schools through the United Way’s Destination Graduation program. During his lectures, he encourages students to stay in school, work hard and make a future happen.

Wood speaks from the heart. He grew

up in a small town in southern Oregon, moved to Southern California and started working as an assembler for Edwards (when it was American Hospital Supply), making about \$6 an hour.

He said he slept on the floor of his aunt’s and uncle’s spare room for about four years, working and going to college. He eventually got his bachelor’s and master’s degrees and worked his way up to executive level.

“I was a very, very average student. I’m very frank with these kids about just how average a student I was,” he said. “But with hard work and just ... taking every class one by one, taking every day one by one, but just never stopping and just keep going down that pathway, really makes a difference.

“If I can just reach one kid, if I can make one kid not drop out, if I can make one kid go to a community college that wasn’t, if I can get one kid to stick to their four-year degree because somebody told them once that it’s possible and it can be done and they did it, then it’s worth every ounce of my time,” he said.



CINDY YAMANAKA, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Edwards Lifesciences employees watch an Orange County United Way video that explains the impact and strategy of the nonprofit and what’s new for this year’s charitable program.

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