THE COMMON SENSE OF GOOD WILL
Hershey Entertainment & Resorts might be one of the sweetest places in the world to work, but not for the reason you might think: The company does not make chocolate. Hershey Entertainment & Resorts (HE&R) is a world-class entertainment and hospitality company dedicated to preserving the legacy of the man behind the chocolate, Milton S. Hershey. Yes, HE&R is in Hershey, Pa., the “town built on chocolate,” and yes, Hershey chocolates can be found throughout the properties. But the number one business for HE&R is serving and entertaining families, welcoming them to this extraordinary community.

Steeped in the caring culture of this small, famous Pennsylvania town, an entertainment company makes its mission to do good for its fellow inhabitants.

By Seth Kahan
HE&R owns or operates many facilities in town including Hersheypark, the zoo, a stadium, a pavilion, an arena, a theater, a nursery and even a hockey team, the Hershey Bears! Also included in its operations are the Hotel Hershey, the Hershey Lodge, a spa, an extensive golf facility, a campground and numerous dining establishments.

What makes HE&R a particularly rewarding place to work is the company’s relationship with Milton Hershey School, a private prekindergarten-through 12th-grade school for children of families with low income, limited resources and social need. Today, the school has about 1,800 students enrolled. HE&R supports the Milton Hershey School, not just with money and time, but through the hearts and souls of its employees.

I spoke with Mike Hain, who holds the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR®) certification and is assistant director of Human Resources at HE&R, and Kathy Burrows, manager of Public Relations. Hain said, “The company provides the employees with the ability to visit Hersheypark whenever they are able, which is a great perk! I take my wife and kids to the park more than 20 times per year. We have an employee day in September when all of us go with our families — it’s incredible! But the most incredible thing about working here is supporting the Milton Hershey School.”

The school was originally established for impoverished orphan boys. Assets from the Milton Hershey School Trust make it one of the wealthiest private schools in the world. Today there are slightly more girls than boys, and students come from a variety of backgrounds.

Classes are small, averaging 15 students per teacher, to increase the quantity and quality of attention provided to every child. The mission of the school is to “nurture and educate children in social and financial need to lead fulfilling and productive lives” (Milton Hershey School, 2011). It is a cost-free, private coeducational home and school.

The school is intimately connected to HE&R, providing many opportunities for employees to get involved and make a difference in the students’ lives. And the staff members take full advantage, giving their time, energy and care. A remarkable number of initiatives make it possible to contribute significantly.

“Many employees throughout HE&R participate in ‘Project Fellowship,’ a unique program where employees and their families spend time bonding with the students of the Milton Hershey School,” Hain stated. “My whole family gets

“When people come here they quickly realize they are not just working for a park. They are working for a higher cause.”
involved and we get to know these kids. These children come from a variety of situations, challenging backgrounds. So, a powerful bond forms between the Milton Hershey School children and us; we become like an extended family. We do lots of things together and get to know them. It’s really special.”

There is a real spirit of work in play at HE&R as all the employees pitch in to make a difference in the students’ lives. Not only do they participate in extracurricular activities regularly, building relationships and helping out, they are part of a larger community fabric that is built on a common sense of good will. It is present throughout the town.

“Even though all the Hershey companies in town — the medical center, the resorts, park, the chocolate company and so on — are separate with distinct leadership teams, we share a passion for participating in the kids’ lives,” Burrows said. “I was born and grew up in Hershey, and the Milton Hershey School culture is everywhere. It’s amazing. HE&R is all about helping the students at the school. Not only do we do recreational activities, but HE&R hires students as interns and they can learn a variety of job skills. Mentoring the students is a big part of life for some of the employees.”

The culture of Hershey is ever present. It extends throughout public life and private enterprise, showing up for young and old alike. From the earliest days in its citizens’ lives through adulthood and with every step along the way, doing good for their fellow inhabitants is woven into the fabric of Hershey life. If ever work and play were part and parcel of each other, it is seen and felt here as the way things work. It only makes sense, then, that the students of the Milton Hershey School find plenty of opportunity at HE&R.

“Based on their interests, students are able to choose the area where they’d like to work. One student chose to work on the Hersheypark Entertainment Team so he could gain experience that will hopefully help him enter the music industry. Another student chose to work in the Pastry Shop at the Hotel Hershey and that experience helped her get into a culinary program. The school also offers college scholarships to qualifying students,” Burrows stated.

Not only is every aspect of the school geared to help its students transit successfully into society, but the original rituals and traditions have been modified to keep their spirit intact while adapting their execution to today’s standards.

Burrows shared, “Back when Mr. Hershey was alive the school would give each child a $100 bill and a suitcase full of clothes when they graduate. Today, the school offers graduating seniors financial assistance and a ‘Senior Suitcase,’ which covers the cost of clothing, bedding and other supplies and necessities for their postgraduate life.”

Students at the Milton Hershey School live in student homes with 8 to 12 students and a married couple who are
house parents. They learn in programming designed around age-specific developmental needs, with a goal of providing a nurturing environment that includes a focus on developing social, emotional, spiritual and physical health.

The alumni of the school often stay involved, networking with the current students to provide coaching and guidance to their younger peers. For example, more than 250 alumni volunteered time during 2009–2010.

It is clear that the school provides a very special experience for the students, the teachers and the house parents. It is extraordinary that this specialness extends beyond the boundary of the institution and into the lives of the people at HE&R.

I asked Hain how the school shows up at work. He said, “Obviously by working here we provide support to the school through the contribution of money and time, but it goes beyond that. We talk about the kids at our management meetings and in our newsletter. When people come here they quickly realize they are not just working for a park. They are working for a higher cause. We support both United Way and the Milton Hershey School, and take both seriously.”

Work extends beyond the traditional 9-to-5 at HE&R, and it is more than a matter of charity. An esprit de corps is present that permeates the corporate culture and leads to all kinds of fun activities that bolster the spirit as well as entertain and please the staff members.

“Our support of the United Way goes beyond financial donations and a modicum of volunteer time. We have races, chili cook-offs and all kinds of other activities. When you work here, your focus goes beyond your job. The focus of the entire company is that we are all in it together. It’s profound,” said Burrows.

What makes it special is the caring that can be felt in every aspect of working together. It adds a dimension that people depend on and use to develop themselves as well as those they serve. A variety of initiatives defines the mutual support, togetherness and solidarity that generates the HE&R experience for its employees.

Burrows stated, “Through Project Fellowship and our intern programs, the students are in the company of people who care about them. It can be life changing, to be surrounded by people who truly care for you. They say it takes a village to raise a child and at HE&R you can be part of that village. Our employees have the opportunity to have a positive impact on these children’s lives and that is life changing for us, the adults.”

This kind of exceptional transformation is found throughout HE&R as a result. It alters lives and has its own kind of gravity
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that attracts people of exceptional caliber. There are many examples of people who give to their community as a way of life. Among the regular employees are many individuals who exemplify charity in spirit and action.

“Our company is a magnet for people who live their lives doing good work,” said Hain. “My four kids interact with the students of the Milton Hershey School. The magic goes both ways; everyone benefits. It’s not just about the students. They are players in a special world where people help each other, and create a better world.”

The Milton Hershey School

Milton Hershey School began as a dream and vision shared by chocolate magnate Milton S. Hershey and his wife, Catherine. Unable to have children of their own, Milton and Catherine decided to use their wealth to create a home and a school for orphaned boys. On November 15, 1909, together they signed the Deed of Trust establishing the Hershey Industrial School (renamed Milton Hershey School in 1951). The following year, the first four boys were enrolled and began to live and attend classes in the Homestead, the birthplace of Milton Hershey.

From these humble beginnings, the school grew. In 1918, three years after Catherine died, Milton gave his entire personal fortune to the school. Milton lived to see the school expand its campus and its enrollment. He continued to be involved in the school’s operations until his death on October 13, 1945. He has been quoted as having said, “The School was Kitty’s [Catherine Hershey’s] idea. If we had helped a hundred children it would have all been worthwhile.”

Today, the legacy and vision of Milton and Catherine Hershey live on in the thousands of students and alumni of the school. Milton Hershey School is a caring community that opens new doors for children whose families could not otherwise afford such an education.

“The mission of Milton Hershey School remains true to the ideals upon which it was founded more than 100 years ago: In keeping with Milton and Catherine Hershey’s Deed of Trust, Milton Hershey School nurtures and educates children in social and financial need to lead fulfilling and productive lives.”

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