



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Creating a “Win-Win” Relationship

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Bob Pepper is senior vice president of manufacturing at NGK Spark Plugs (USA) Inc., located in Sissonville, West Virginia. Bob is responsible for all U.S. manufacturing and OEM distribution to the United States, Canada, Mexico and South America.

Prior to joining NGK in 2007, Bob had over 30 years of experience in automotive parts manufacturing and supply, holding senior management positions with Plastech, Webasto Roof Systems and Textron.

Originally from London, England, Bob lived in Canada for over 20 years before coming to the United States in 1994. He is a graduate of the Canadian Institute of Management at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada.

He is a member of the board of directors of the Charleston Area Alliance, as well as its community development committee; a member of the board of the West Virginia Manufacturers' Association and a member of the board of the Great Rivers Affiliate of the American Heart Association.

NGK's relationship with the State of West Virginia and the Kanawha Valley area began in 1994, when it announced the development of its manufacturing and distribution facility in Sissonville, West Virginia, just north of Charleston. In recognition of that relationship and the responsibility that it creates, NGK made financial contributions to a number of state and local organizations, a tradition that continues to this day. This tradition is reflected in NGK's vision statement and its desire to be “a pillar of the community.”

There is no doubt that the organizations that receive such support from NGK and so many other businesses see great value in the donations of money, material and time. The need is great and seems to increase every year. However, I'd like to take a look at the other side of these relationships: the value that comes from giving. That value takes many forms.

First, and perhaps most important, is the value that comes from simply doing the right thing. Successful companies, while providing financial



security and accompanying benefits to its employees, can and should provide support to improve the life of the community as a whole. The value that these organizations gain in the community, while seemingly intangible, is real. Establishing relationships becomes easier when your reputation is positive. Doors open much easier than they might otherwise.

Second, the expertise that exists within an organization can help provide both the vision and strategy for the future development of the community. **Active** involvement in chambers of commerce, trade and community development organizations gives participating businesses a voice in the decision making process that creates an environment that serves their needs. That translates into real value.





Third, support of the local education system adds much more obvious value. Anything we can do to improve the quality of education for the source of our greatest asset can only benefit us as a company. Machine technology is critically important, but ultimately it is the quality of our employees that makes or breaks us. At NGK, we have been very specific in our targets for education. Here are two examples:

- We sponsor The Challenge Program at Sissonville High School, designed to motivate students to excel, both in and out of the classroom. This school is located a few miles from the NGK campus, and is a major source of potential employees. There is no better way for us to achieve a “win-win” result.
- NGK sponsors the education initiatives of the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra. By helping to broaden the scope of education for local students, we can increase the potential of those students who choose to work for us. That’s *real* value.

Fourth, we find opportunities to involve associates directly, where the need is the greatest. During the recent economic downturn, we placed some of our associates in places that had the greatest need during such times. Rather than laying people off, we simply “loaned” them to organizations which were providing

critical aid to people in less fortunate positions. Where was the value for NGK? It is really quite simple. Employee morale was given a huge boost, as fears of losing jobs were alleviated. Also, while we didn’t know how long the downturn would last, we had confidence that at some point we would see a recovery. When that happened, we had a full complement of trained, motivated associates ready to help us immediately benefit from the recovery. No hiring or training costs. *Real* value. As a representative of NGK, I am very proud to be a member of an organization that puts its employees first.

Community membership brings certain rewards and responsibilities. The viability of any community can be measured in part by the degree to which the members participate in its management and development. I can tell you, firsthand, that the value of the investment that NGK provides to the community is matched – or exceeded – by the return on that investment. A focused, thoughtful involvement strategy truly creates a “win-win” relationship. ♪

CONTRIBUTING TO THE VITALITY OF OUR COMMUNITIES



Howard E. Seufer, Jr.
Charleston, WV

Howard recently completed a two-year term as chairman of the board of directors of The Education Alliance, the state’s premier nonprofit research and K-12 public education fund. He also is an officer and a board member of the West Virginia Mansion Preservation Foundation and chair of the West Virginia University Social Justice Visiting Committee.



Ellen Maxwell-Hoffman
Charleston, WV

Ellen is a board member, officer and past president of the Jackson County (WV) Chamber of Commerce. She is a member of the Polymer Alliance Zone and is a Partner in Education representative for Ripley High School.