

# IMPACT

The Insurance Industry's Contribution to Community Development



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# A Company That Gives Where It Lives

**Argo employees raised money for charity from its offices around the world. On the annual Red Nose Day in Richmond, Virginia, Argo staff raised funds to help alleviate child poverty.**

Photos: Argo Group.

**W**hen the global specialty underwriter now called Argo Group was founded in 1948, its headquarters was a humble, one-room office in San Francisco. Within weeks, company employees had formed The Argoneers, a group that encouraged active social engagement and community support.

From the first year on, 95 percent of all company employees donated regularly to the United Crusade, forerunner of the United Way. And as the company's operations expanded through the U.S., The Argoneers followed. In every community the company served, its employees gave back, starting a tradition of employee-led giving that has lasted seven decades.

Fast forward to 2017. Today, Argo Group would be almost unrecognizable to its original founders—given its growth and worldwide expansion. But the company's commitment to local community support has never wavered. CEO Mark E. Watson III, who took the helm in 2002, put it this way: "At the outset, we declared our commitment to the communities in which we live and work. The model we chose back then was a combination of central programs—what fundraisers now call major gifts—and community events run by our staff, which the company also sponsored in part. Every time we opened an office, we trusted our local staff to help us know which local organizations and campaigns would



enable us to help appropriately. Every community is different. Even as we've become a global company, it's been sensible to allow much of our giving to be inspired by the local knowledge of our staff worldwide."

That grassroots approach has served the company and the communities it inhabits well. Norma LeVan, a member of the company's San Antonio Community Relations Committee, is impressed with the range and quality of the submissions her team gets to review. "Every day we get to see how engaged our colleagues are in their cities and towns. They know where the need is, they know which agencies are doing the most effective work and they certainly know how to get their co-workers involved."

Over the past year, those co-workers proved their commitment in a wide range of community activities. In London, an Argo charity gala raised £20,000 for the Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity, which is devoted to treatments and cures for childhood illnesses. In São Paulo, they donated 600 pounds of food to the homeless, supported a local hospital and backed an organization that helps cancer patients. In San Antonio, they participated in the annual Artpace "Chalk It Up" event to help raise awareness for art education. They distributed food to families in need during the Thanksgiving holiday. And they ran a United Way campaign that provided financial support to local charities. In Toulon, they inspired young sailors by inviting them to tour Artemis, the America's Cup sail racing boat that Argo sponsors. The list goes on and on. They raised funds for a playhouse, helped supply under-privileged kids with necessities, helped women build self-promotion skills and provided hundreds of meals through local food drives.

"Everybody wants a chance to have a better life. With our resources and our team, we can help make that happen," wrote Mark Watson in his latest letter to shareholders.

Argo is a global company, and its support for any new communities it joins is as strong as the commitment made to its legacy locations. Proof in point is The Argo Foundation, established after Argo moved to Bermuda in 2008. At the time, the

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– Mark E. Watson III, CEO, Argo Group



local economy was still strong, but many sectors of the population were suffering. The Foundation got to work, reaching out to frontline agencies to assist. Since then, Argo has supported more than 50 Bermudian organizations involved with education, healthcare, youth programming, the arts, family support, child protection and a host of other activities and interventions.

When the local economy began faltering after 2010, Argo's support was even more critical.

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**Teams of Argo employees in San Antonio move out at Thanksgiving to distribute groceries to families in need.**

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## Power of Caring

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realized he too could help his community after seeing the State Farm TV commercial about the Neighborhood of Good. And he did just that.

“This young boy was so moved by the commercial, he searched NeighborhoodofGood.com to find a volunteer event he could attend,” said Marketing Analyst Daphne Garrison. “Titus then asked his mother to drive him more than an hour to a Neighborhood of Good event in Washington, D.C., where he spent an hour helping make blankets for shelter pets and the homeless.”

Neighborhood of Good events

were held in 17 other U.S. cities.

The events, held March 20-26, were staffed by State Farm Good Neighbor Crews and open to the public. At each Neighborhood of Good event, those who stopped by were encouraged to spend five minutes making blankets for shelter pets and the homeless or writing inspirational notes for veterans.

“Besides creating awareness for our Neighborhood of Good platform, the purpose of these events is to provide an avenue for customers, including families, to volunteer. It also provides an opportunity for agents and employees to participate in their local community,” said Marketing Manager Mandy Laux.

On May 13 another series of events was hosted with the goal of raising awareness of food insecurity in our communities. Events have been held in cities across the U.S. and will continue throughout the year.

“Micro-volunteering, where people can volunteer as little as five minutes, gives them a taste of volunteering and how it feels,” explained Laux. “Hopefully, the experience will inspire consumers to continue to volunteer and create a positive impact in their community.”

State Farm is helping people in neighborhoods across the country see how easy it is for people to volunteer and make a difference locally.▲

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## Gives Where It Lives

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“Local not-for-profits suffered a double whammy of increased need for services and a reduced donor pool due to the slow down in the Bermudian economy,” said Elspeth Gray, President of The Argo Foundation. “It’s not just that people had less disposable income, but also that mergers and acquisitions in the international company sector resulted in less corporate money available to charitable causes.”

When Argo’s total contributions in Bermuda topped \$1.25 million last year, Mark Watson alluded to the values the company upholds, saying, “At Argo Group, our core purpose is to secure the future for our policy-holders, employees, shareholders and the communities in which we live and work. Through The Argo Foundation, we’re able to contribute

to the welfare of our community, particularly youth charities in Bermuda. We’re happy to have reached this milestone.”

With Argo’s help, many programs have made a lasting difference to the wellbeing of the greater Bermudian community. In 2011, the Foundation set up the Bermuda Glee program, a performing arts initiative designed to break down barriers among Bermuda’s youth. The program became a transformative force in local culture. Jane Thorpe, head of the Drama Department at The Bermuda High School for Girls, put it plainly. “Bermuda Glee does exactly what its motto says it will do: ‘curtains up, barriers down,’” she said. “When the students and teachers come together, where you go to school is irrelevant. You are working together as a group of students and teachers to create a

performance. It was a very rewarding experience. Even today, students involved stop me in the street to catch up and to just chat about what they are doing.”

Beyond the support coordinated by its growing number of regional community-relations committees, Argo encourages all staff to give to the charities of their choice, then bolsters their personal donations with a 150 percent matching grant, by all accounts an unusually high percentage for a company-wide program. “There are needs everywhere,” said LeVan, “and we’re all asked to find those needs and help meet them with the support of the company.”

Corporate conscience. Local teamwork. Personal generosity. With these three complementary approaches, Argo really is a company that gives where it lives. ▲