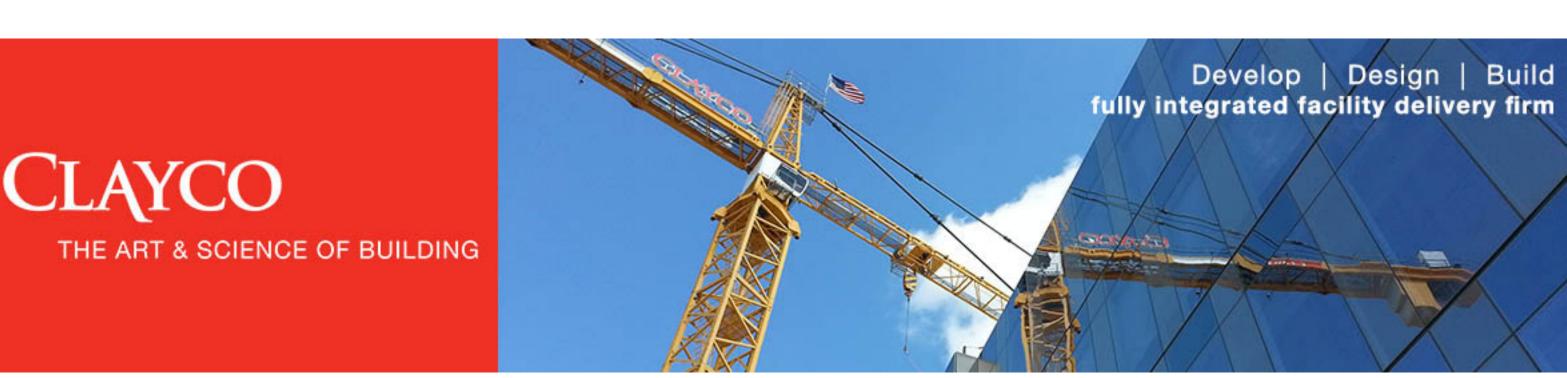
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MEETINGS AND CONVENTIONS

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It's the latest in the repertoire of activities for a corporate meeting: a company

getaway that includes a community project. For a small but growing number of corporations, community work-rehabilitating

a house in a run-down neighborhood, for example-is becoming a routine part of company outings and industry gatherings.

"The satisfaction lasts a lot longer than the 10 minutes you debrief after the session is over. You know something positive is done," says John Anderson, manager of profitability and analysis for Ameritech Corp.'s pay phone service. The Chicago-based company arranges community service projects as a regular

team-building exercise like rope climbing is that you've touched people's lives."

Last July, for example, a group of employees of the telecommunications firm

helped put the finishing touches on a one-acre arboretum that houses native

part of its management training program. "One thing you can't get out of a

Illinois plants at Orchard Village, a residential development in Skokie that's home to people with mild to severe disabilities. The managers had help from Mary Jane Inc., a landscape company in Evanston, and worked hand-in-hand with Orchard Village residents. Passionate about





entertainment.

year period. (It was started in September 1994.)

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"In a typical employee-employer relationship, you have a job, and you get compensated," says Jack McAllister, executive director of Orchard Village. For Ameritech, "this is part of a strategic initiative. Building this arboretum allowed them to accomplish a training objective."

At Ameritech, community-oriented training sessions date back to 1993, when the company instituted its corporate leadership program. Before, initiation for Ameritech managers was limited to a one-day orientation. Some companies are substituting such community projects for other forms of

Marcia Glenn, vice-president of senior economics for Northfield-based Kraft Foods Inc., was a little uneasy when she decided to scrap her annual August

golf outing for 25 employees in the dairy division and work with United Way to spruce up Wesley Daycare Center. Ms. Glenn's fears turned out to be unfounded. "It was an unbelievable success," Ms. Glenn says. "It was hot and sticky and lots

of hard work. But our employees felt like they accomplished something."

playground while the center was empty.

The employees formed five teams, painted a mural of a rainbow and the sun on the back of a tool shed, planted shrubs, and cut the brush and trees in the

"We weren't sure if people would enjoy it," says Paula Caminiti, senior administrator for Kraft and the project's coordinator. "But it was such an incredibly positive experience for everyone."

Such good works needn't be done only for local meetings. At Abbott Laboratories, meetings for community projects date back to 1994,

when 400 employees of the hospital laboratories division traveled to Fort

Lauderdale, Fla., for a national sales conference. While there, they spruced up

six residential homes in a low-income neighborhood and a poverty-level day care center. Annual 'Outreach' Deb Parry, sales support coordinator for North Chicago-based Abbott, started

the project after tiring of the more traditional team-building exercises, such as

The project has become an annual affair and is now called the "Outreach Program."

girls' club in nearby Glendale.

loved it."

relay races in the sand or building a boat.

environmental responsibilities that are part of our mission statement." Last year, the Abbott group divided their efforts: 400 employees worked on a

boys' and girls' club in Scottsdale, Ariz. and 400 more worked on a boys' and

According to Ms. Parry, the meeting is "one way that we live up to our social and

Ms. Parry calls the meeting "organizational chaos." All the work is done in a fivehour flurry. Organizing the massive undertaking involves choosing the project, taking a

skills assessment, and assigning people to tasks. Ms. Parry says planning for

the meeting inspires "months of waking up at 2 a.m. in a cold sweat. On a whole, it's probably two years' worth of labor. If you applied an hourly labor charge to the project, it would be close to \$200,000."

In some cases, community projects serve as mixers for clients and customers.

In 1992, Marriott International Inc. introduced the idea into an annual week-long

sales conference with key customers and top sales people. Seeing results Last year, Marriott employees worked side-by-side with customers peeling paint

Diego. "So often in the business world, you don't actually see the results of your effort," says Karen Riha, national account executive for Marriott in Rosedale. "This really gives you a sense of accomplishment. You were sweating and you really

and rehabilitating the inside of a St. Vincent de Paul homeless shelter in San

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According to Mike Lupfer, the director of national sales administration for

customer that is pretty tight. There is nothing like it. People work harder on

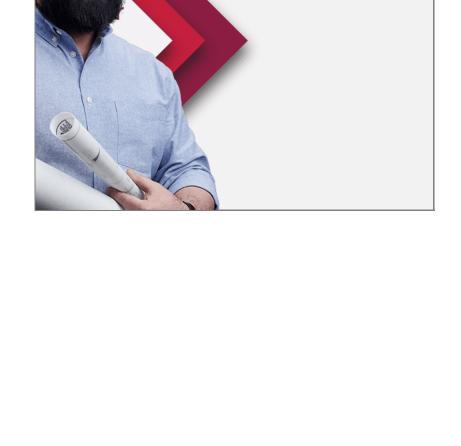
Marriott in Washington D.C., "There is a bond that you develop with the

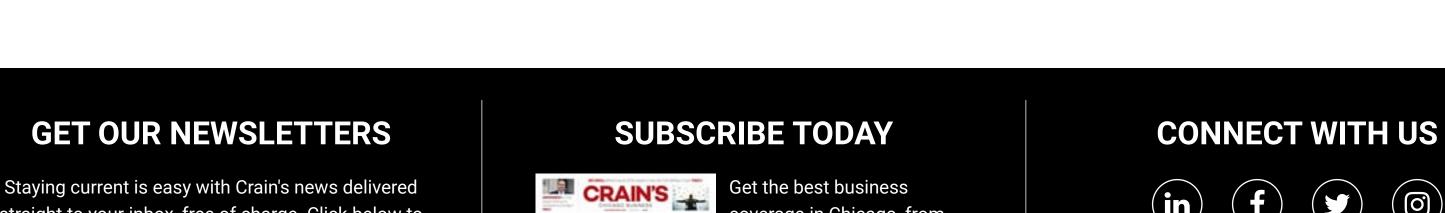
those projects than they do on their houses, and that's the beauty of it.

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