

# SSA

## MAGAZINE

THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE SELF STORAGE ASSOCIATION

DECEMBER 2022

ISSUE \$8 / ANNUAL \$96

# Timeless Generosity

Storage companies give above and beyond the holiday season. P.10



**Mentors**  
International

LIFTING FAMILIES OUT OF POVERTY  
TO SUSTAINABLE SELF-RELIANCE

ALSO INSIDE:

Spreading the Cheer P. 18 • An Ounce of Prevention P. 24 • Storage Franchises P. 34



Gary Free (CEO of Towne Storage) and his wife Kathy (center) are pictured in the Dominican Republic working with Mentors International.



# Timeless Generosity

Storage companies give above and beyond the holiday season.

By John Dunlap

**T**he Christmas season is many things to many people. Family gatherings, Christmas carols, trimming the Christmas tree, watching “A Christmas Carol” and greeting people warmly with good tidings. The message is one of peace, love and giving. It’s a joyous time of the year that we almost all look forward to. But what happens to that giving spirit when the holiday season ends?

Make no mistake about it, self storage jumps into the holiday spirit of giving in a big way. Toys for Tots is the logical cause to support given its need for storage space for donated items. Food drives to help the needy are also well supported by the industry.

However, for quite a few storage companies, the urge to find good causes to support extends well beyond the holiday season into a year-round venture. It also involves encouraging employees to volunteer to help with charitable efforts in their own communities.

What follows is a look at three notable examples of companies whose philanthropic efforts know no bounds (or season).

Towne Storage, with 31 locations in Utah, Arizona and Nevada, is seriously into community involvement, highlighted by Mentors International, Operation Underground Railroad, AMAR and Choice Humanitarian (as well as a host of Christmas-themed causes).

A-1 Self Storage, headquartered in San Diego, California, reflects the ideology of its founders, the Caster family, with numerous programs especially devoted to helping those in need across the border in Mexico. And CubeSmart, with over 1,200 facilities, gets behind causes like Habitat for Humanity, Main Line Animal Rescue and Good Samaritan Shelter, as well as encouraging its employees to seek local charities to support.

The stories and efforts emanating from all three of these companies are heartwarming, and display

the kind of generosity and urge to give back to society that changes people’s lives much for the better. And at this time of the year, it not only makes the holiday spirit bright, but assures us that the spirit lasts 12 months of the year.

## On the Towne

In 1993, good friends Gary Free and Jamie McQueen took an interest in the self storage business. By 1994 their first storage project, South Town Storage, opened. By 2002, they had opened three facilities but wanted to expand their vistas and brought in Burke Bradshaw to operate their management company. From the get-go, it was apparent that Free and Bradshaw wanted to involve the company — now Towne Storage and Towne Storage Management Company — in charitable causes.

“It has become part of our company’s mission,” said Bradshaw, COO of Towne Storage. “We love to help. In our executive and staff meetings, we discuss ways we can be impactful in our community. This is a regular dialogue for us, and if it makes sense we like to help.”

One such cause that made sense to Free 20 years ago was Mentors International, whose mission is to lift individuals and families in developing countries from the depths of generational poverty, putting them on a path of sustainable self-reliance through mentorship, training and financial solutions.

“We were impressed with this charity’s mission to help small business owners in developing countries expand their operations by providing education and micro loans,” Bradshaw added. “I was introduced in 1997, and Gary started working with this group in the early 2000s and was soon a member of the board. He became more involved, as did other people associated with Towne Storage. The ‘hand-up, not a handout’ concept is interesting and inspiring to us.”

See *Charity*, page 12

**“We always keep an eye out for opportunities to help others. One area we are working on now is how to engage our staff in good causes. Helping others brings us joy, and we want our staff to experience that same joy in their lives.”**

**BURKE BRADSHAW**  
COO of Towne Storage



Charity, from page 11

Another major support effort has focused on AMAR, an organization that builds and improves the lives and livelihoods of some of the world’s poorest and most disadvantaged people. It has helped refugees from Iraq and now is concentrating efforts on helping refugees fleeing Ukraine.

“Gary made a special trip to Iraq during the flood of more than three million displaced people in the Middle East,” Bradshaw said. “Both Gary and his wife, Kathy Free, and my wife, Tara Bradshaw, and I have been involved helping refugees for many years. Starting with assisting a single refugee, the circle of friendship and help has grown to many refugee families finally reaching USA citizenship and self-sufficiency. Many of these families are doing things they never were able to do in the countries they left.

“We have made lasting friendships with remarkable people that came here hoping for a new start, a new life,” he added. “It is wonderful that being in the storage business has allowed us to be involved with these people.”

Bradshaw acknowledges that the holiday season is a great time to do something for others, and Towne Storage is all in. But he also thinks there is a priority to get Towne staff members involved in other causes on a year-round basis.

“We always keep an eye out for opportunities to help others,” Bradshaw concluded. “One area we are working on now is how to engage our staff in good causes. Helping others brings us joy, and we want our staff to experience that same joy in their lives.”

### Casters Are A-1 in Giving

For Brian Caster, president and CEO of A-1 Self Storage, the urge to give and help others is in his genes and chromosomes, as well as his faith. His father (Bob) and mother (Terry) started the nonprofit Serving Hands International over 30 years ago to help those in need in nearby Mexico (the program now extends worldwide).

“My mother and father started and still run the 501(c) along with the Caster Family Foundation,”

See *Charity*, page 14

**ARCO MURRAY**

**CONSTRUCTION MADE SIMPLE**

- FASTER** Construction
- FEWER** Change Orders
- LOWER** Overall Cost

Questions About Your Next Project?  
**GET IN TOUCH**

**28 States Worked In**    **13M SF + Coast To Coast**    **115+ Self Storage Projects**

**LYNDHURST STORAGE**  
Lyndhurst, New Jersey

**FLAMINGO STORAGE**  
Las Vegas, Nevada

*Charity*, from page 12

said Brian. “What shaped their giving has been primarily two things: First is our faith — we are Catholics and in scripture it’s very clear that we are responsible to our brothers and sisters in need. Secondly, both my parents grew up very poor, so they understand how a helping hand lifted their spirits and their families. They never forgot that feeling and those people who helped them.”

In 1966, when Brian was a kid, his parents drove him 30 miles south of San Diego into Mexico, notably Tijuana, to personally view the life that the poor had to endure. It had a huge impact on his parents and Brian. Since then, the Casters have been involved in building up the Tijuana and Northern Baja areas, including building schoolhouses and homes.

A-1 also is very involved in helping inner city schools in the San Diego area through the Cristo Rey St. Martin College Prep in San Diego. It is part of the Cristo Rey Network, a Catholic-based organization dedicated to delivering a career-focused, college preparatory education for students

with limited economic resources. Another project A-1 supports is Rise Up Ministry, in which men and women who have been released into society after having been in prison for many years are trained in how to be machinists.

The A-1 website includes a list of causes as well over 100 organizations around the world, including health care, education and social services.

“There is such a joy in giving back,” Caster said. “Anybody and everybody can give. Every year we give our employees \$300 gift cards with the provision that they find good causes to donate that money to. We tell them to go make special moments for others in need and they can tailor that to their own community. They get really excited about it. We’ve been doing that for 10 years now.”

While Caster very much enjoys the spirit of the holiday season, he also sees the need to keep giving all year.

“We enjoy giving during the Christmas season, but we try to bring that spirit on a monthly basis,” Caster concluded. “My recommendation to people is to do something for someone else. Make a difference in someone’s life. Just do it!”



*A-1 Self Storage is heavily invested in helping citizens of the Tijuana section of Mexico (shown here receiving school supplies).*

See *Charity*, page 16

**“We enjoy giving during the Christmas season, but we try to bring that spirit on a monthly basis. My recommendation to people is to do something for someone else. Make a difference in someone’s life. Just do it!”**

**BRIAN CASTER**  
CEO of A-1 Self Storage



*Charity*, from page 14

## Think Local

CubeSmart may be a big company, but it also has a big heart. Since 2015, teammates from the corporate office have volunteered over 1,650 hours through its Day of Service program and in the process has assisted 14 different charities, including Habitat for Humanity, Main Line Animal Rescue and Good Samaritan Shelter. Since 2017, the company has donated more than 1,400 storage units to local charities. And, in keeping with the holiday spirit, CubeSmart has worked with Toys for Tots since 2010.

That's just the way it should be, according to Josh Schutzer, vice president of finance for CubeSmart.

"It really all goes back to us having a culture of service in line with our mission of providing genuine care," Schutzer said. "And it comes from the top down. Our CEO, Chris Marr, thinks it is of utmost importance to leave a positive imprint on the community. In essence, self storage is basically a local business, and we like to give to those communities in which we operate."

Through the holiday season, CubeSmart is active in Toys for Tots, offering drop-off locations. It is done on a national scale, with the CubeSmart marketing department organizing the effort.

In 2021, over 55,000 toys were collected at CubeSmart locations around the country. The vast majority of the facilities are involved. And the national corporate office also puts together a food drive every year at Thanksgiving to help those in need.

But much more than that, CubeSmart encourages all its employees across the country to become volunteers in their local communities and find good causes to support.

"We feel that there are opportunities for us to sponsor certain community events and to volunteer our time," Schutzer added. "Whenever a manager at a facility comes up with an idea of a good cause, he or she runs it through their district manager, who then communicates it to our marketing department. Volunteer work and charitable giving are an important part of our culture."

Speaking of giving, if a CubeSmart employee finds a charitable organization that he or she would like to give to, CubeSmart will match that donation up to \$100.

"If a cause is important to them, then we want to hear about it," Schutzer said. "Our customers and teammates are everything to us. Their communities face a variety of challenges, and CubeSmart wants to be part of the solution." ♦



As it is for many self storage companies, Toys for Tots is a major focus every holiday season for CubeSmart, which also supports other causes on a year-round basis.