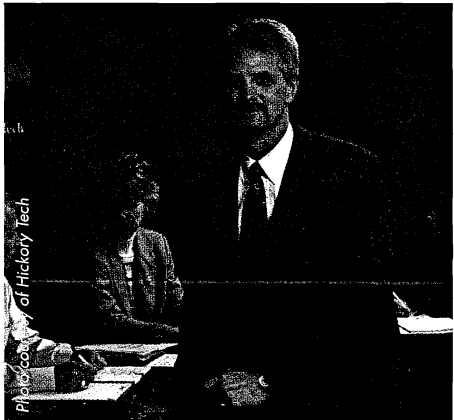




COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY



A history rooted in Mankato drives HickoryTech to give back.

In 1898 the Mankato Citizen's Telephone Company made a commitment to the community by providing phone service to area residents. More than a hundred years later, the former MCTC—now HickoryTech, a diversified communications corporation with 400 employees—still provides a range of telecommunications services. They also set high standards for corporate citizenship through philanthropy and partnerships that benefit Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Most recently, the HickoryTech Foundation gave \$28,000 to support five Presidential Scholarships and half of the Theatre program's fall musical. The other half came directly from the corporation.

HickoryTech President and CEO John Finke believes strong programs for Minnesota State Mankato students lead to increased quality of life for all people in the region.

"It's about developing young people, and that's the part we think is important," he says. "We think it's a good investment overall for potential employees for us, but really for the whole community."

One of HickoryTech's longest-running investments in the University is through the Presidential Scholarship program, which produces high-achieving alumni who in turn enrich communities in southern Minnesota and beyond. HickoryTech has supported Presidential Scholarships since the program's inception in 1995.

One of the early HickoryTech Presidential Scholars, Teri (Ryland) Hammill '99, says she believes the award set her apart from other job applicants. Hammill, who lives in Ham Lake, Minn., went on to receive her MBA from the Carlson School of Management and continues

to work at Boston Scientific-CRM, formerly Guidant-CRM, the company where she began her career.

Fellow recipient Kathryn Peters '07 says she worked harder because of her Presidential Scholarship and kept her GPA high. Without financial worries, she was able to focus on coursework and participate in extracurricular activities. She also got to know other Presidential Scholars through the meetings, volunteer projects and mentorship experiences that were part of the program. "We felt that having received this scholarship, we were really worth something," she says. Mayo Clinic recently chose Peters as one of eight nationwide applicants for a dietetic internship.

Finke believes a student's overall college experience is important for the business community. "It's about the internships a lot of them are getting. It's about the advisory role that the college is playing to help mentor and tutor them as they prepare, in my mind, to step out of college into the business world."

HickoryTech also has a long history of supporting the Department of Theatre and Dance, a community favorite.

"We do eighteen productions a year and corporate sponsors are very valuable to us," says Department Chair Paul Hustoles.

Since 1994, HickoryTech has provided funds for the always-popular fall musical—*The Wizard of Oz* in 2004 set the all-time attendance record; *Peter Pan* in 2006 came in second. Six to seven thousand people will see each show, Hustoles says. "That's an amazing gift to the community."

And since the University offers both bachelor and master of fine arts degrees in

musical theater, the opportunity to present challenging productions to large crowds is invaluable.

"HickoryTech gives us the opportunity to really use the theatre as a laboratory for students," Hustoles says. "We present more musicals than any other college or university in the state, and one of the reasons is because of grants like the ones from HickoryTech."

As far as Finke is concerned, the University is an important part of HickoryTech's philanthropic mix. "The Minnesota State Mankato Theatre program serves an important role in our community by providing a quality and local experience to residents," he says.

"By supporting education, community and cultural initiatives, we strive to better the overall quality of life within the communities we do business," Finke adds. He admits that although most area residents probably don't realize the type of giving HickoryTech and its foundation provide, he feels members of the business community look to the company for that kind of leadership. "I think they know that we're here, and we know that's part of the core values from which we operate."

What HickoryTech and its foundation seek is not a gleaming corporate citizen badge. Rather, they aim to stay true to the principles on which the company was launched in 1898. HickoryTech-style philanthropy benefits not only the community and students, but also invests in future employees, wherever they find their vocational home. ☞

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