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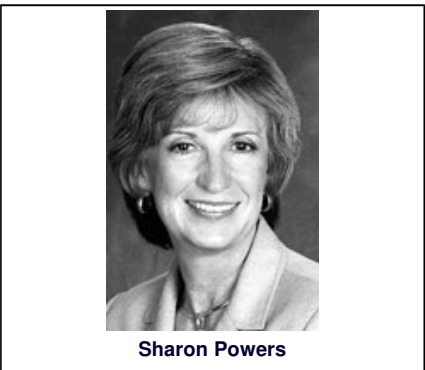
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Schools need business leaders to step up

It's no secret that our education system is challenged. Overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and less-than-impressive academic scores challenge our ability to attract companies looking for a skilled workforce.

Unfortunately, the outlook for our schools is not very promising in light of the present economic crisis and the state budget cuts that slashed the money available for textbooks, funding for teachers, and the ability to increase the number of empowerment schools.

It was once said that it takes a village to raise a child, and nowhere is this more apparent than in our schools. With classrooms getting more crowded and funds that go directly into the schools decreasing, it is up to us, the business community, to bridge the gap. I've been told that if a child is not reading or performing at grade level by fifth grade, he or she never catches up. Not only does this affect their role in society but in the workforce as well. Through the Clark County School District's Community-Partnership "Focus School Project" program, business partners can "adopt" an at-risk school. These business-school partnerships can make an incredible impact to the school, its teachers and students as well as to the business partner.




The North Las Vegas chamber has been involved with this effort for several years. In 2005, the chamber became a business partner with Lowman Elementary School. Lowman Elementary, like so many other at-risk schools, is a Title I School, meaning that 75 percent of its students are at poverty level and are eligible for free breakfast and lunch programs. Lowman also has approximately 850 students in kindergarten-second grade, an astounding number.

While the chamber has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for efforts such as food and clothing drives, the annual holiday toy drive, and

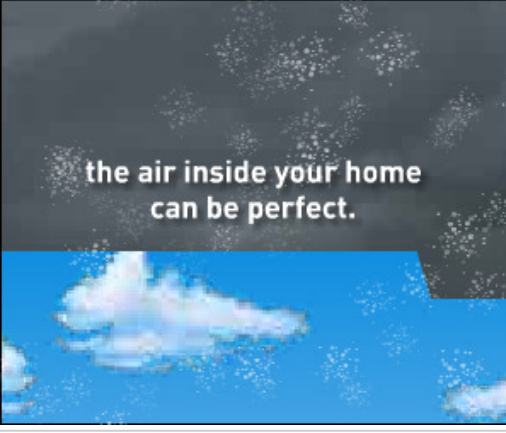
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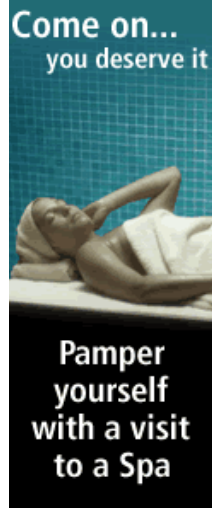
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the annual Boys & Girls Day, these efforts have been successful due to the generous spirit of many of our members. For instance, a massive food drive was conducted right before Thanksgiving last year that involved LM Construction providing and manning a 15-foot semi-trailer in the parking lot of North Vista Hospital. Through this effort there was enough food collected to not only send food home with the students that needed it, there was enough left to carry them through the holiday season. The Wal-Mart and Sam's Club stores also continue to support the school financially with donations each time a new location opens. Meadow Gold Dairies has always been there to provide ice cream during Boys & Girls Day. These are just a few examples of what our business members are doing to support "our school." The list goes on with numerous other members conducting their own efforts that benefit Lowman.

This year, the Foundation Board of Trustees voted to expand the list of schools the chamber and its foundation will assist. In addition to Lowman, Wooley, Lincoln Edison, Elbert Edwards, Wendell Williams, and Duane D Keller elementary schools will be recipients. These schools will participate in the Business Education Enterprise Program and be eligible for teacher minigrants, mentoring and speaker bureau access, and various other resources that will come available as our members step up and participate in this worthwhile effort.

Last year, 90 schools within the Clark County School District were designated as Focus Project Schools. This year that number has increased to 146 and the number is expected to grow in light of the financial challenges many families are experiencing.

What can you do to help? Focus Project schools are located throughout the valley and chances are there are some near your place of business. These schools need your help. More importantly, the kids need your help. Partnership with an at-risk school is not necessarily about expending monetary resources. It can involve spending as little as half an hour every week mentoring or tutoring a student, reading to a class, or assisting the school with a project. Your company can make the difference by partnering with the chamber and helping its designated schools or signing on as a business partner yourself to one of the many schools needing the private sector's help. Call the chamber at 642-9595 or CCSD's School-Community Partnership at 799-6560.

Sharon Powers is president and CEO of the North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce.

