

2024 CEO Letter

I do not know anyone that does not spend at least a brief moment in the depth of winter reflecting on the past year and what they hope to accomplish in the new year that lies ahead.

When I started to think about where I had a good year or a bad year, won or lost, had success or failure, I was left asking the more fundamental question, where did I add value? I liked this angle because the outputs are not always in our control, but our personal inputs usually are. It is hard to imagine living with regret if we are confident that we have done our best to add value to the various circles we are involved in.

Perhaps you're curious to hear my self-evaluation on where I felt I personally added value, but that will have to wait for another time! I thought for this letter's purposes I might focus on the broader context of where I have seen Clark Associates employees add value to their coworkers, vendors and customers, and their community.

Adding Value to our Coworkers

Considering we spend the better part of our waking hours with our coworkers, one would hope we find value in those relationships! Whether it is celebrating weddings and newborns or sharing grief with the passing of a loved one, I see so many examples of employees supporting each other through life's major events.

And when it comes to acknowledging each other's unique skills, of course our WebstaurantStore Design Team took things up a notch by creating custom trading cards for each employee using artwork that was AI generated and inspired by the person's best qualities!



AI-generated employee trading cards



Employee baby shower at one of our distribution centers

And while as a company, we want to initiate these ways of showing appreciation to employees, there are further examples of employees self-initiating adding value to each other, like at The Restaurant Store, where a group of employees raised over \$1,000 to support the incidental needs of a co-worker who had a child very prematurely and that child was receiving specialized care far away from home. How special to work with a group of people that would do that for a coworker!

Adding Value to Vendors and Customers

Sometimes I am amazed how 'impressive' people think it is that we pay our vendors on time and ship product to our customers in a timely and complete manner. Perhaps the bar is lower than it should be! I see our teams working hard to provide for our vendors and customers alike. As they say, people vote with their dollars, which is why more and more vendors want to be aligned with us, and we continue to earn new customer relationships.

We had a record growth year in our customer membership programs with WebstaurantStore and The Restaurant Store. Clark PRO was also awarded 'Supplier of the Year' by one of its largest customers, an iconic American hospitality and entertainment brand. And our National Accounts division, less than a decade old, continued to add new accounts ranging from Top 10 chains in the country to some of the hottest emerging concepts.

But the story that really got me was when I heard about how one of our chain account customers was struggling to get items, items we do not even sell to them, to New York City for a Today Show spot, and our employee immediately hopped in their car and



Customer bikes being delivered to Rockefeller Center

personally delivered them to Rockefeller Center! That is an exceptional example of going above and beyond, but I see this happening every day even in the smallest of gestures with our customers.

Adding Value to Communities

Our business performed well in 2023, which is why we were able to give the largest grant ever to the Clark Associates Charitable Foundation (CACF), which in turn distributes that money to charitable causes all over the country. We supported 317 unique charities in 25 cities and 9 states this year, a record. We were able to put more money back into our communities in 2023 than in the first 12 years of our foundation's work combined.

There is a lot more to adding value to our communities than what people see at the corporate level. Employees at Clark add a tremendous amount of value directly to non-profits that they are passionate about. In fact, nearly 300 employees applied for and received grants from the CACF for non-profits that they are personally connected to. One of our employees has been a Girls on the Run coach for 10 years!



McKenna Aleksivich coaching Girls on the Run (second from right)

Another employee out of our Tampa office is a court-appointed special advocate (or CASA) for children in the system who are abused or neglected. What incredible dedication.

Our employees also rallied at the building level to support important causes like our distribution center

in Bloomsburg where 45 employees hosted its first 'Give Back' Night raising money for several non-profits. Our contract division, Clark Food Service Equipment, even put their professional skills to use in renovating the kitchen of the Building Bridges Foundation, an equine therapy center for veterans facing PTSD and related conditions. It is humbling to work with employees who care so deeply about the communities we all live in.



Joey Baltzell advocating with CASA (third from left)

Is it bad to say a company doesn't have a heart and soul? It is truly *the people* within the company that are the heart and soul. It is *the people* that are



Distribution Center 'Give Back' Night

creating and adding value. We are undoubtedly at our best when we are adding value, and the examples I have seen across Clark Associates in 2023 makes me so proud to be in those ranks. In 2024, may we all strive to find ways to add value in the ways we contribute to our workplaces, families, friends, and communities.

L. Gene Clark
CEO, Clark Associates, Inc.