



Judge Robert Eckels

# Outside The Box

■ by George L. Rosenblatt

Harris County's County Judge Robert Eckels is the equivalent of a \$1.23 billion corporation's chief executive officer.

As such, an easy assumption might tag him as too important and too busy to do more for his charities of choice than write a check.

Such an assumption, however, would be dead wrong, for he is among leaders who understand the importance of service, of digging in to help others.

"Through my job as County Judge, and through the worthy organizations I support, I seek to be a change agent," says Judge Eckels.

"I like to build the infrastructure, the roads and parks and libraries, around which we build a community. I like to help build the social institutions that hold our community together," he continues. "I seek and support entities that rebuild lives. One life at a time, we build a community. One community at a time, we build a nation."

Besides always-appreciated money, support means contributions of time, effort, knowledge and expertise.

"Perhaps because of my responsibilities for our county juvenile justice system, I am particularly interested in youth organizations," says the judge.

To combat the deadly appeal violence and gangs hold for many vulnerable children and teens, he started Texas' "Do the Write Thing" ( [www.texasdtwt.com](http://www.texasdtwt.com) ).

The program gives middle-schoolers an opportunity to write about both violence and alternatives to violence in their schools and community.

"It also shows them that they have the power to break the cycle of violence in their homes, schools and neighborhoods," he says.

Clearly among the busier of the county's more than 3.6 million other residents, Judge Eckels lives the principle of active, loving, participatory parent.

Translation: Take time and make time for your kids.

That principle is a cornerstone for a solid family upon which a solid community – including its business – builds.

"My daughter, Kirby, is 10 years old, and I try to be as big a part of her life as is possible," he says.

For Spring Break, he took her on a father-daughter ski trip to Big Sky, Montana – a wonderful underscore for his quotidian role at home.

"I may just be a timekeeper at her swim meet, participate in her school career day or help clean up after a school festival," says the judge, "but I know how important my simply being there is for her. It is important for me, too, and, ultimately, I believe for the community of which we both are members."

For her part, he says, she increasingly understands

the importance of participating in the community through giving, which she herself does by volunteering through school and church.

Whether through a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, a faith-based organization, a civic service organization or a youth group, says Judge Eckels, "volunteering teaches youngsters values that make them – and through them, America – strong."

Correspondingly for adults, he says, volunteering not only provides an opportunity for service, but also builds a closer, safer community and country.

"Volunteering and its interactions teach us about serving our community, a good far greater than ourselves alone," he says.



Harris County's County Judge Robert Eckels (left) puts his mettle to the pedal, one active way to contribute to a worthwhile cause beyond just writing a check.

By serving that greater good, Judge Eckels concludes, "we learn, we construct and we strengthen, element by element, our greater community. In business terms, time and effort thus directed and devoted is not spent. It is invested."

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