

Register's 21st Annual Holiday Spirit Award draws attention to business owners of good will.

GENEROSITY IS A WAY OF LIFE

BY JAN NORMAN
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A car dealer; a marketing consultant, an insurance broker. These are the three Orange County business owners who Register readers voted as most deserving of the title of Holiday Spirit for 2008.

Online and print readers nominated more than 60 local business owners for their generosity, kindness and good will all year long.

What is so special about a car dealer, a marketing consultant and an insurance broker?

It is not their occupations but the way they live their lives and conduct their daily business, their nominators said.

Read about them and find out who **ocregister.com** readers voted as the 21st Annual Holiday Spirit. This is the first year readers have been able to select as well as nominate for this recognition.



Winner: David Wilson
Wilson Automotive Group
Orange, CA

Wilson describes himself as an Iowa farm boy whose family of seven didn't have indoor plumbing until he was 14.

You learn early that there are people who don't have things and that it's true: the more you give, the more you get," Wilson said.

He has 1,400 employees - and no layoffs during tough times for the auto industry - but when he had just 100 employees selling 10,000 cars a year, Wilson decided that he couldn't personally take care of every customer; but he could take care of 100 employees and they would take care of customers.

"Since 1976 he has been my auto dealer for both my husband and me," said Betty Peters. "In 1997, I became a widow, and he has made my life better for being the honest man that he is, along with his employees."

Wilson Vice President Vikki Murphy, who nominated Wilson on behalf of his employees, said: "Since coming to Orange in 1982, David has been a benefactor to virtually every school, hospital or charitable organization in one way or another."

Wilson long has helped Orangewood Children's home. During a 1986 cold spell, he went out and bought 20 humidifiers and set them up at the home for children with colds and flu.

"If you wait for boards to meet and vote and requisition equipment it would be spring," Wilson said casually.

When Orangewood almost closed its doors in the 1990's recession, Wilson gave \$100,000 to keep it going and told management not to reveal the donor.

Wilson now owns 16 dealerships, each with a junior partner. Long-time employees can earn up to 25 percent ownership through sweat equity, Wilson said. "That's what I'm most proud of. We grow our own people and when they're ready, I buy another dealership."