

Corporate Partners: Making A Friend Before You Need A Friend

By Sue Hassmiller

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Flying over the Pacific Ocean, the hours are starting to merge together. Newark to Singapore to Jakarta to Medan and, finally, Banda Aceh. I still don't know quite what to expect when I get there. I am not sure if I am nervous or just tired.

Before leaving, I came across an article called, "Disaster Relief, Inc.," written by Anisya Thomas and Lynn Fritz, in the Harvard Business Review. In the article, the writers discuss the 2004 tsunami and partnerships, calling it a "turning point" for corporate involvement in humanitarian relief.

When I was a Red Cross volunteer during Hurricane Andrew, one of my responsibilities was to contact corporations and solicit in-kind donations for our workers in the field. Once donations were offered, I turned over my list to those working in logistics to follow through. Although we were success-

ful—thanks to the support of the business community—we all felt we could have done more to form these partnerships and get the logistics in place ahead of time. As the article points out, the best partnerships are those that are made before a disaster strikes. I think the Red Cross is increasingly moving in this direction, recognizing that it is important to "make a friend before you need a friend."

On this trip, I will be joined by three corporate donors, all of whom gave generously to the American Red Cross for its tsunami relief and recovery efforts. I will be with Leslie Meek-Wohl, senior program officer for community development at the Citigroup Foundation; Diana Kusumawardani, HR director of PT Abbot Indonesia; and Mering Ngo, senior public relations specialist from Chevron, Indonesia. Both Abbott and Chevron

have longstanding relationships with the Red Cross. I look forward to learning more about these corporations and their involvement with the Red Cross and tsunami relief.

Thomas and Fritz describe corporate giving as a way for corporations to "better their reputations with customers, demonstrate their good intentions and attract employees who want to work for responsible corporate citizens." I am excited to see how these intentions are turned into action and helping people on the ground.