

## Circle of Excellence Program Rewards, Motivates and Gives Back

**Crystal Winner:** Fay Beauchine, Carlson Marketing, Minnetonka, Minnesota, USA

**Client:** Qwest Communications International Inc.

**Program:** Qwest Circle of Excellence



Qwest Communications International's Qwest Circle of Excellence (COE) program recognizes its high performing sales and care professionals. In 2008, Qwest again turned to Carlson Marketing to create a motivating travel experience for achievers in the top three percent, inspiring them towards improved sales performance.

Qwest also wanted COE to reflect the company's philosophy of Communications + Community Spirit of Service. This philosophy extends beyond Qwest's commitment to customer service and superior products—Carlson needed to integrate environmentally sustainable elements and community service activities. To fulfill all these objectives, Carlson designed an incentive trip that not only rewarded high performers but also encouraged sustainability and corporate social responsibility, leaving attendees feeling proud of both their achievements and the company for which they work.

The COE attendees are a diverse group. The honorees range from entry-level customer service representatives to highly experienced sales professionals with multi-million dollar accounts. Carlson therefore worked diligently to create an experience that would appeal to every person in attendance. They selected San Diego, California as the destination in part for its broad appeal and the number of entertainment options it presented, and it decided with Qwest to have each business unit hold its own awards dinner. This created a more meaningful experience for the guests, as each dinner could be personalized to the culture of each particular group.

COE kicked off when the honorees arrived at the beautiful, historic Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego. That evening, they were invited to a welcome reception held on the main beach at the hotel, where the CEO of Qwest greeted the group and congratulated them on their outstanding



achievements. The reception was themed "Surf's Up, WAY Up!", and guests enjoyed their night in the midst of a beachcomber bar, surfboard tables, a California cuisine buffet and a surf simulator. In support of Qwest's Community Spirit of Service philosophy, sustainability was a major focus of the welcome event. Carlson used recycled napkins, energy-efficient lighting and live plant centerpieces, which were later donated to a local charity.

On the second day, the honorees' first activity was a charitable teambuilding event. The whole group gathered to make backpacks for the Warrior Foundation, which sends supplies and messages of support to wounded soldiers. COE attendees worked in teams to fill the backpacks with essentials, such as toiletries and clean clothes, and included a personalized note and a picture of everyone who helped make the gift.

Following this act of service, honorees spent the day participating in exciting activities of their choice. Attendees had the difficult choice of selecting between a behind-the-scenes tour of San Diego Zoo, a Midway Aircraft Carrier tour and harbor cruise, a shopping trip in a scenic village, kayaking, golfing, spa treatments, surfing lessons and sailing.

That evening, attendees were recognized for their achievements at their individual business unit awards dinners. Each group held a Qwest Black and White Ball in a different area of the hotel. Honorees were greeted with paparazzi photographers and were treated to a three-



course dinner, premium open bar and wine service. The Executive Leadership Team of each unit hosted their respective dinners, thanking honorees for their hard work.

On the final day, the COE group again made backpacks for the Warrior Foundation. After the group community service, they had a chance to learn firsthand about the direction of the company at a general session business meeting, where the CEO delivered a "State of Qwest" speech and attendees were able to participate in a Q&A session with the executive team. And that evening, the COE experience was topped off with a dinner; entertainment provided by Frank Caliendo, a popular comedian known for his uncanny impressions; and a trip to Club Qwest for late night dancing and celebration.

The 2008 COE program proved to be highly motivating. Qwest was able to honor 7% more top performers than the previous year. The program also effectively weaved recognition and Qwest's Communications + Community Spirit of Service philosophy together. The CEO program donated over \$17,900 (U.S.) worth of goods to the Warrior Foundation and was able to incorporate sustainability into the fun and entertainment. Moreover, the program satisfied both the diverse group of honorees and Qwest. All the attendees were delighted with the experience, and Qwest gave the event a 9.5 out of 10 rating for meeting company objectives. COE was a true blend of recognition, work, and social responsibility that left an impression on everyone involved. ●