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Dan Shea, right, meets with Bob Roehrig, left, an advocate for Fond du Lac's ACE Academy, and Vern Widmer, a teacher at the academy. The three of them spearheaded the idea and capital campaign to start and build the academy, which provides students with the skills and knowledge to pursue careers in architecture, construction and engineering. Shea is chief operating officer at Shea Electric & Communications in Oshkosh. Roehrig and Widmer are retired. Roehrig worked at County Materials and Widmer worked at CD Smith Construction.

Shea tries to 'ignite a passion'

He believes in building a stronger community by giving back

Take the best of the teachings of Simon Sinek, Zig Ziglar and the Jaycee Creed about service, leadership and putting people first, and you'll land on Dan Shea.

Shea, chief operating officer for Shea Electric & Communications, is a firm believer in a pay-it-forward mentality. It could well stem from his childhood as a regular at his Boys & Girls Club in Manchester, N.H., where he was president of the Keystone Club, a leadership development program for teens. There, he also met his wife, Patty, when she tried to get into the club.

"I was a club kid from the time I was six, and today, we're very heavily involved in the Boys and Girls Club of Oshkosh and give to the club in Manchester as well," Shea said. "She did join the club, and it's a love story as we've been together for 37 years."

It's not the only youth-focused endeavor Shea gets behind. He makes a point of doing outreach with multiple area high schools and middle schools, be it participating in career fairs; getting ace time in classrooms to share his personal journey from apprentices, to journeyman, foreman and business owner; sharing the "day in a life" of a tradesman; sharing how technology has played a huge part in his company and industry; and so much more.

"To me, it's not about pushing but educating them," he said. "I'm trying to ignite a passion where it exists."

He also invests significant time and resources in Fond du Lac's ACE Academy, the largest collaborative effort in the state between industry and education. The program, hosted at Fond du Lac High School, focuses on architecture, construction and engineering, providing students with skills and knowledge to pursue a career in these fields. In addition to providing financial support, Shea has been involved with the curriculum, as well as donating staff time and tools to help students pursue projects such as wiring houses and garages.

"I'm definitely passionate about working with young people and youth apprenticeship opportunities like this one," Shea said. "It's a great way to take a hands-on approach through a program that is a great example of a public/private partnership. We do it with the hope of engaging young people to enter the trade, get an apprenticeship and make a difference. That's how we pay it forward."

Shea considers kids his "why." He's a big believer that the way we engage youth matters to their trajectory in life.

"Kids want your attention," he said. "They prefer your good attention but will settle for bad attention.

I want to give them good attention and try to make a difference because they're soaking it up whether we think so or not. The way we engage them matters. We want them to lean in."

It's the reason behind his involvement with ACE Academy and school interactions with youth. It's also why he invests in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fond du Lac. "You may not be able to change a 35-year-old, but you can make a difference in a kid's life; that's where it has to happen."

Making a difference for Shea takes many forms. He's also involved in various behind-the-scenes capacities with the Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services in Oshkosh, the Day by Day Warming Shelter in Oshkosh, the Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts in Fond du Lac and the Agnesian Healthcare Hospice Hope in Fond du Lac.

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I'm a horsepower kind of guy. I'm intentional in being a behind-the-scenes guy who provides thrust. Tell me what to do and I'll provide the horsepower. There are a lot of people who make a lot of things happen. I'm not the guy who is there to get credit; I'm there to just get it done.

—Dan Shea,
chief operating officer,
Shea Electric & Communications, Oshkosh

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Whether it's relighting the Christine Ann Center with more efficient lighting; fixing a broken washer, installing air conditioners or assisting with logistics on the new building for the Day by Day Warming Shelter; performing service work at the Thelma Sadoff Center for

Arts; or helping with the Boys & Girls Club of Oshkosh's new addition, Shea is on standby for many things that help these organizations function, and function well. That includes using his voice for the sake of influence.

"The Day by Day Warming Shelter is a great example," he said. "Some facets of the community are not in favor of the location. I came out in support of it and put that out there. I believe that if you care about somebody or something, you need to voice what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. I will tell people what they need to hear, and that's sometimes a different perspective."

His out-of-the-box thinking is also a reason people turn to him to brainstorm or problem solve.

"I have a different perspective," Shea said. "I'm a tradesman. I'm not from here originally. Sometimes, you have to break eggs and make omelettes instead of doing things the way it's always been done," he said. "People tap me for being out of the box. The biggest compliment I could ever get is for someone to call me because they want somebody to think outside the box. People tell themselves stories; I challenge that all the time."

He does so with a hearty dose of not only rationale but big heart. Shea is entrenched in his adopted community. He and his wife moved to Wisconsin in 1991 and relocated to Oshkosh in 1992. In addition to being a great place to raise a family and start and grow a business, Shea finds the Oshkosh area—and all the communities in which Shea Electric does business (primarily a triangle connecting Oshkosh, Fond du Lac and Wausau) to "have a different and very special culture," he said.

Shea's stance on giving, no matter what environment he's in, takes a cue from Zig Ziglar's statement: "You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want."

"I'm a horsepower kind of guy," he said. "I'm intentional in being a behind-the-scenes guy who provides thrust. Tell me what to do and I'll provide the horsepower. There are a lot of people who make a lot of things happen. I'm not the guy who is there to get credit; I'm there to just get it done. Simon Sinek says you have to go first, to give of your time and your talent and your dollars, if you're able to. Luckily, I can do all three."

In doing so, he hopes to impart knowledge and inspire a giving heart in others—and encourages others to do the same. "You may inspire the next generation of leaders," he said. "Something may resonate and somebody gets involved. You have to give first and lead by example so others get involved."