

Buzz Award Let There Be Rest

The Buzz Award is The Show's populist trophy – the winner is selected based on voting by attending retailers and media. And the winning item is a brand new design, as only those items displayed in the New Products Pavilion are eligible to go on the ballot.

Despite the overwhelming glut of travel pillows the past couple of years, there's still room for improvement in this oversaturated category. Or so retailers and media seem to think, as the **Cabeau Evolution Cool Travel Pillow** garnered the lion's share of votes.



Building good buzz: TGA President Michele Marini Pittenger bestows the Buzz Award to founder David Sternlight (seated) and crew: Billy Allonce, Stephanie Randall, Steve Sharp, Ryan Hilterbran, Lenin Lora, Chris Samba, Ashley Sumii and Rudy Zuniga (left to right).



Cabeau – which now counts four travel pillows in its mostly comfort-oriented product lineup – came up with a better mousetrap this year, attracting Buzz votes with its dual-density memory foam design with a series of large, radially spaced air vents. It's such a preposterously obvious idea it's a wonder why nobody thought of it sooner. The patented pillow, which shares its stepped, wedding cake-like shape with Cabeau's other pillows, also features a magnetic toggle to help customize the fit, and ushers in a new price point for travel pillows, at \$59.99 MSRP.

AWARDS PHOTO: KERRY PITTENGER; BUZZ AWARD PHOTO: ADAM TRECARTIN; EVOLUTION COOL TRAVEL PILLOW PHOTO: COURTESY OF CABEAU

Community Service Award Cabeau Cares

Time is money, so the saying goes. But time is not money – money can be gained, lost, and even recovered. But time can only be lost; you can't make more of it, you can't get it back. Which makes time the more precious of the two, and is why this year's Community Service Award winner's philanthropic contribution is so noteworthy.

Once a month, in a program dubbed Cabeau Cares, the company shuts its operation for the day. Instead of reporting for work, its employees devote that day's time to a local community project. The company's philanthropic energies have gone toward worthy goals as diverse as preparing and serving breakfast for family residents of the Los Angeles Ronald McDonald House; distributing camouflage travel pillows to Camp Pendleton marines headed for deployment; assembling care packages at the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank for distribution to in-need senior citizens; and doing laundry and food prep at the Los Angeles Mission.

It all began with a lunchtime conversation. "When we first started the company, my partner and I talked about what would be important for us. We realized it's really difficult to carve out time," recalls CEO David Sternlight. "I have a son, we have our families, our friends, and taking care of ourselves and going to the gym and sleeping enough and making sure everything was good on that end, and of course all the time we're spending with a new, growing company."

"We realized we could use the company as a vehicle, to be able to give back and feel good about ourselves; we're able to not just look at this as a business venture to make money, this is something bigger for us."

It's truly a team effort, and the way charities are selected is very democratic: employees take turns. Two employees are assigned to each month, and it's up to them to run that whole event, from picking the cause to how they will contribute. "We have a budget for this every month," says Sternlight. "Some of it entails giving product back, some of it entails buying food; it's part of our weekly meeting, every week. If we just had an event we talk about what just happened, get feedback and try to improve the experience. And we go forward three months in advance."

Lots of companies are involved in charitable giving, weaving volunteerism into the corporate culture, but Cabeau's devotion of an entire work day to a cause is unique. "A person came to me at one point and told me, long ago, this was a mistake because we were effectively losing one day out of the 22 days of work each month. I ended up doing some research and found this study, they basically had employees working a lot harder, a lot more intensely, with a lot more focus, when they're able to do something bigger than just trying to make money and going about their job working 9 to 5 and clocking in, clocking out. So we realized how valuable this was to our people within, and how much of a difference it made to our community."

It's a virtuous circle of good works. Employee Billy Allonce disclosed that after the day's philanthropy is over, employees actually head back to the office to complete their work, not because it's required, but because they feel the company deserves its own karma-like payoff. Team member Rudy Zuniga's girlfriend was so impressed, she took a day off from her own job to pitch in on a Cabeau Cares day. Like the many good causes it's helped, Cabeau Cares has become something bigger than itself. *2016 Industry Awards continued on page 60*



Jack Holodnicki, TGA Award and Community Service Award Committee chair, with David Sternlight, founder of Cabeau, which won the award for its Cabeau Cares program of giving back.