

Making a Very Big Difference

"Giving back" comes naturally for the Newman family, America's oldest cigar maker which found equally dedicated soul mates in their business partners, the Fuente family. **>BY CRAIG WILLIAMSON**



> l. to r. Bobby Newman, Carlos Fuente Jr., and Eric Newman.

You would think that keeping a cigar development and manufacturing organization thriving after more than a century in business would be enough work for anyone, even for any two people. But for brothers Eric and Bobby Newman of the J.C. Newman Cigar Co., success was an incentive to work even harder in other fields.

Many years ago, looking for a pet for his young family, Bobby acted on a suggestion from his mother to visit Southeastern Guide Dogs in Palmetto, Fla., one of 10 internationally accredited facilities in the country that trains dogs for the visually impaired. He'd always been fascinated by the idea that dogs could be trained for such work.

Bobby came home with an "ambassador dog," a Labrador Retriever with hip dysplasia disqualified from the rigorous guide dog training. He also came home with a passion for service of his own and a mission now in its second decade. "They must have seen a sucker," he jokes. "I became Chairman of the Heritage Society, which is the giving, legacy arm, and am extremely involved. We've been able to raise millions of dollars for the school."

Bobby explains that as the need for the service expanded, so did its mission, including a program started by Bobby called "Paws for Patriots" that provides guide and post-traumatic stress disorder dogs to the entire U.S. military at no charge. For an inspirational look at just one story in this amazing work, check out the Southeastern Guide Dog website at www.guidedogs.org and spend three minutes watching the video "Scout's Journey."

"The *New York Times* says 350,000 men and women have come back from the global War on Terror, in Afghanistan and Iraq, with PTSD," said Bobby. "So we

are helping take care of these men and women. We're changing lives every day."

Brother Eric Newman's own signature inspiration for philanthropic work came, like Bobby's, out of a family experience, although in Eric's case, the family was the wider cigar family. Some 15 years ago, Eric was driving in the cigar region of the Dominican Republic. With him that day was Carlos Fuentes Jr., president of Arturo Fuente Cigars. Eric and Carlos Jr. were friends and business associates in a "family" relationship begun by their fathers decades before.

As Eric tells it, a pleasant drive through the countryside took them past children kept out of school by a shortage of classrooms in many of the

was to give back to the people of the Dominican Republic by building a wing on a school and providing some fresh drinking water."

As seems to happen with the Newmans, one good deed turned into another and then another. In Eric's case, the joint Newman-Fuente Cigar Family 23-acre complex now comprises a primary school, high school, health clinic and facilities for recreation and organic farming. More than 5,000 children and their families are serviced by the project, every one free of charge. Five classes already have graduated from the high school and some 85 percent of the kids have gone to college.

So far, more than \$10 million has

> More than \$10 million has been invested in the joint Newman-Fuente Cigar Family 23-acre school and recreation complex in the Dominican Republic's cigar producing region.

rural areas. Talk about a drive that took an unexpected turn!

"We both felt that we really had a good run during the cigar boom," Eric explains, "and in order to thank and give back to the people of the Dominican Republic for growing the best tobacco and making the best cigars in the world, we wanted to do something for the people. So we thought, 'Let's maybe build a wing on the local school so these kids could go to school.'

"So we travel a little further, we saw some kids carrying jugs of water on their shoulders as many as two miles and even then the water was not fit to drink.

"So we said, 'Why don't we see if we can get them clean drinking water in their homes?' So our original goal

been invested in the project. And here's the kicker: every dollar contributed to the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation goes to the project. The customary non-profit agency overhead costs such as administration, accounting, legal, promotion, etc. are totally covered by the Newman and Fuente families. The full story can be found at www.cf-cf.org.

Please visit the websites listed above. The Newmans say this is the most rewarding work they have ever done, but their charitable success stories are works in progress. They could always use some additional helping hands. **S**

Craig Williamson is president of the Cigar Association of America, Tel: (202) 223-8204, Web: www.cigarassociation.org.