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**SMALL
BUT**

MIGHTY

Wyoming's Y2 Consultants makes an outsized impact on its community

BY MICHELE MEYER

For once, Zia Yasrobi was speechless. He'd received the Melvin Jones Fellowship Award, a humanitarian honor named for the Lions Clubs International's founder. Yasrobi was recognized for his efforts to support the organization for 34 years.

"A big, strong guy—and he was in tears," recalls former Jackson Hole Lions Club President Michael Schrotz.

That's because humanitarian causes touch Yasrobi's heart—and that of his wife, Brenda Younkin. The couple, co-owners of Y2 Consultants in Jackson, Wyoming, place corporate social responsibility efforts at the center of their firm's company culture.

In America's least populated state and wealthiest county (Teton), Y2 has built a reputation not only for civil and structural engineering, planning, land surveying, and natural resource management, but also for volunteerism and generosity.

"We make our living from the community and the region, so we feel it's important to give back and leave it better than we found it," Yasrobi says. "The more you put into a community, the more you get out of it."

HUGE FOOTPRINT

Philanthropy was a high priority when Y2 opened in 2010. Now, even with only 36 full-time staffers, the firm's altruism footprint is huge.

Two-thirds of employees give a combined 1,000 PTO hours annually to their communities, with many serving on boards of organizations. And from the firm's yearly profits, 15 percent—or \$30,000 to \$50,000—is donated to charities across the state.

Yasrobi and Younkin don't broadcast such largesse—or keep score. But news travels fast in a state known as "a medium-size town with really long streets," as former Gov. Edward Herschler once said.

Y2's Jackson headquarters is located near Grand Teton National Park. Its offices in Cheyenne and Pinedale also are located amid natural beauty. The firm attracts engineers, planners, surveyors, and range scientists who are passionate about the land and wildlife around them—and want to give back to their communities. "So much of Y2 is built around a culture of giving," Younkin says. "You get like-minded people."

You also get a tight-knit community. One year, 25 staff members gathered in the couple's kitchen to bake 10,000 holiday cookies for delivery to clients, charities, firefighters, police, and municipal employees. "They don't always get a lot of thanks, so we want to show our appreciation," Younkin says.

Similarly, paying staffers for their time—in whole or in part, depending on the time commitment—when they volunteer elsewhere "is investing in the community, which is where our business comes from," she says. "The bottom line has to work, but supporting your staff is how you keep your staff. Our dedicated and enthusiastic employees are our most valuable asset."

Given its size, Y2 doesn't have a need for a community service steering committee. Workers choose passions to follow, requesting paid time off or financial grants.

"Our firm has a whole different way of doing things," Younkin says. "One of our strengths is we're flexible. Zia and I have a very open-door policy about everything."

Y2 staff's time and money have helped the Elks Club, Boy Scouts, Wildlife Society, Habitat for Humanity, and various food banks and 4-H programs.

"We're very big supporters of 4-H, which teaches kids business and life skills—and helps pay for their education,"

5 WAYS FIRMS CAN INSPIRE A SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY

No matter how tiny your company is, you can serve your community in big ways. Here's how Y2 Consultants galvanizes giving among its small team:

- 1. Say yes.** Empower your employees to choose where they give time and money.
- 2. Be an example.** Employees will follow your lead.
- 3. Share the spotlight.** When Yasrobi was named a fellow of the Wyoming Society of Professional Engineers in 2022, he credited co-workers by name.
- 4. Honor your workers.** Recognize their giving efforts, and ask affiliated associations to do the same.
- 5. Actively listen.** Consider your employees' and clients' ideas—and take action on what you hear.



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OWNER
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says Yasrobi, who’s known for frying 3,600 eggs each year at an annual Lions Club fundraiser—while also putting many people’s meals on his tab.

Y2 is also a majority female-owned business (by Younkin) and hires many women for its technical and engineering roles, so it’s no surprise the company also supports budding young leaders. The firm annually sponsors \$500 science, technology, engineering, and math scholarships for two young women entering college. “Those are historically male-dominated careers,” Younkin says. “Anytime we can support women, we do.”

FACING CHALLENGES

Born in Iran, Yasrobi moved to the U.S. on his own at age 17 in the mid-’70s. Named Zia—Persian for “light”—he was fluent in English, thanks to an American tutor in childhood.

Life wasn’t always easy, but he’d rather not offer details. “You get what you put into it,” he says. “I chose my country and am proud I did. I have found nothing but love and support here. They’ve taken care of me when I needed it.”

Life wasn’t always easy for Younkin, either. She was raised on a working ranch in rural Nebraska and, from an early age, fixed tractors and cooked for large groups.

Y2 began as Zia’s one-man operation, while his wife worked full time as research science director at Teton Science Schools and did Y2’s books on weekends.

“Zia said he was going to do it all on his own,” says Younkin, with a chuckle. “That lasted six weeks. He’s an amazing engineer. But day-to-day management is not his jam.”

Fortunately, it is hers. As the firm’s majority owner, COO, and CFO, Younkin has a background in range science and environmental policy. She now runs Y2’s daily operations and natural resources department.

She joined Y2 full time in 2013. In 2017, Y2 acquired Pierson Land Works, a 37-year-old survey and planning firm literally next door to Y2. Then in 2020, Y2 acquired Western Research & Development, a 41-year-old civil design, surveying, permitting, water rights, and planning firm in Cheyenne. That created a multidisciplinary team with offices in Jackson, Cheyenne, and Pinedale to serve clients across the country.

The couple is grateful they can pay back the generosity they’ve experienced in their lives. Among causes dearest to Younkin’s heart is the Community Safety Network, a domestic violence shelter in Jackson.

“We have resort communities that are pressure cookers for domestic violence,” she says. “It’s amazing and terrifying how prevalent domestic violence is. And telling women to ‘just leave’ is not a solution. It’s not that simple. You need the financial ability to leave, and a two-bedroom rental apartment can be more than \$4,000 a month. It’s brutal.”

Being able to help families in bad situations “is important, and it’s healing,” Younkin says.

She adds: “I’m a firm believer that if you do good things, good things will come to you.” ■

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In 2023, Y2 bought two pigs in Teton County, one of which was donated to the Senior Center. Y2 also bought a steer in Sublette County, born and raised on a local ranch that runs cattle in the Upper Green.



A Y2 staff member with Jennie Gordon (right), First Lady of Wyoming, at a Salvation Army fundraiser.



Y2’S GIVING BY THE NUMBERS

Each year, Y2 Consultants gives a significant amount to charities and local organizations. Here’s the breakdown for the past year:

15 percent
of profits to philanthropy

\$25,000
to Old Bill’s Fun Run, a fundraiser for 4-H and other nonprofit organizations

\$10,000
to other charities

40-50
turkeys donated to the Elks Club’s community Thanksgiving meal

3,600
eggs donated and cooked at Lions Club breakfasts

1,000
hours of PTO put toward volunteering



Zia Yasrobi (left) poses with Michael Schrotz (right) at an annual Lions Club fundraiser.

