



Upper Valley HOPE team.

BY KATHERINE P. COX ✨ PHOTOS COURTESY OF HYPERTHERM HOPE FOUNDATION

Hypertherm HOPE Foundation

DEDICATED ASSOCIATES DRIVE COMMUNITY GIVING





Clockwise from above:
 Middle school students on STEM
 tour of Hypertherm's Gold LEED
 manufacturing facility, 2019. FIRST
 LEGO Robotics New Hampshire
 qualifier competition, 2019. Associates
 help to install a playground at an early
 childcare center. HOPE Foundation
 staff paint at the Upper Valley Haven.

Those focus areas are STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), substance-use disorder, and early childhood.



REACHING OUT AND SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY has long been a guiding principle at Hypertherm, Inc. in Hanover. “Hypertherm has had a longstanding core value of community leadership,” says Jenny Levy, president of the Hypertherm HOPE Foundation, a public nonprofit launched in 2010, and executive vice president of People, Community, and Environment at Hypertherm. “It started with our founder, Dick Couch, and his wife Barbara, who together grew the business. In 2001, an informal philanthropy team of associates formed to make decisions about donations to the community on behalf of Hypertherm. They would receive requests from organizations for donations, and they wanted to include our associates on what to give and to whom. Then in 2010 Barbara formalized the philanthropy team by establishing an official foundation around Hypertherm’s philanthropic work in the community.”

The HOPE team, comprised of 12 associates across all areas of the company, evaluates grant applications from nonprofits in the community, votes, and decides on how much grant money should go to those organizations. “One of the most compelling and powerful parts of HOPE is that all of the decisions are put in the hands of our associates. It’s a very important principle of ours. We have democratized the decision-making of our foundation to reflect Hypertherm as a 100 percent associate-owned company. Our philanthropic work is done through the hearts and minds of our associates,” Jenny says.

A grant review committee vets the grant to make sure it fits the mission of the foundation—to be a catalyst for collaboration and compassion, inspiring solutions for positive change in Upper Valley communities—and then the HOPE team votes on those grants, which are distributed quarterly. “We

have about a half a million-dollar budget annually and all of it is deployed.”

HOPE receives donations from the public, Hypertherm associates and retirees, partners across the community, and trustees on the HOPE board. “We are constantly trying to balance the needs of the community with the budget we have across the focus areas we have,” Jenny says. Those focus areas are STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), substance-use disorder, and early childhood.

STEM

“The focus of our STEM program is to expose, excite, and engage kids ages eight through eighth grade in and out of school,” Jenny says. HOPE has strategic partnerships with the Montshire Museum of Science and the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, and it sponsors LEGO and robotics



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Clockwise from top: Project Search intern tour. Girls Technology Day plasma cutting, 2019. HOPE Foundation staff delivers Meals on Wheels in Lebanon.

competitions. Hypertherm also hosted, pre-COVID, more than 1,000 students annually visiting on field trips, doing hands-on activities, and taking part in question-and-answer panels with engineers. In addition, they host a high school internship program and the STEM vacation camp for middle-schoolers.

“With strategic focus areas like STEM, yes, it is grants to community organizations that are also doing STEM work, but we try to expand our work by bringing our own capabilities to bear to expose, excite, and engage middle-school youth,” Jenny says. In addition to participating in in-house programs, associates volunteer their time out in the community doing things like coaching robotic teams. That integrated partnership extends to HOPE’s other two focus areas.

SUBSTANCE-USE DISORDER

Focusing on education for prevention, increasing empathy and removing the stigma around people who are in recovery, and funding programs aimed at sustaining and supporting recovery, HOPE partners with other nonprofits and employers in the community and has its own programs within Hypertherm to address substance-use disorder. “This came about over five years ago when our associates voiced either their own or family members’ substance-use disorder.

Sadly, we also had an associate pass away from an overdose. We found that across our community this was a growing epidemic. We took a lot of time to listen to and understand our own associates and honed in on areas we wanted to focus on—education, reducing stigma, and increasing our conversations out in the community. Now we are proud to call ourselves a recovery-friendly workplace,” says Jenny.

HOPE has a strategic partnership with Headrest, an organization in Lebanon that offers counseling, treatment, and a safe place for those in recovery, and with the Headrest Opportunity to Work program that helps people find work. “We are hiring people from that program and trying to support people in their recovery through employment,” Jenny says. HOPE also supports Moms in Recovery through the Upper Valley Haven, Step Up Parents, Connecticut Valley Addiction Recovery, and Second Growth.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

HOPE’s newest focus is on early childhood, helping to build and support programs and organizations, concentrating on youth resilience to offset adverse situations, supporting parental confidence to strengthen families, and childcare center quality. “We’ve partnered with ECEA (Early Childhood Education Association), piloted programs such as No Drama

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Discipline, funded a Be Resilient program, piloted A Circle of Parents support group, and have done many volunteer projects using associates who volunteer their time in childcare centers doing such things as painting and playground maintenance,” Jenny says. Other organizations HOPE partners with include the Family Center in Norwich, TLC Family Resource Center in Claremont, Good Beginnings in West Lebanon, and Waypoint, a family resource center in Lebanon.

Using grant funding and the capabilities of associates at Hypertherm, who are paid for 32 hours of volunteering a year, “We can really drive forward change and progress that our community partners have been doing for decades.”

HOPE’s work goes beyond these three areas, too. “During COVID, we received funds to deploy to community nonprofits that were facing constrained funding or had additional needs. We quickly created a COVID relief fund where we received over \$150,000 of additional donations that we immediately turned around and regranting to nonprofit partners that were addressing the most acute needs across our community,” Jenny says. For example, HOPE helped fund personal protective equipment for childcare settings and increased funding to the Upper Valley Haven in White River Junction, which had a higher demand on its food shelf.

In addition, HOPE has what Jenny calls general community funding buckets that are used to address topics such as education, health and wellness, food and shelter, and the environment. Among the organizations HOPE helps support are CHaD, High Horses Therapeutic Riding Center, David’s House, Upper Valley Land Trust, Tri-Valley Transit, Cover Home Repair, WISE, and Twin Pines Housing Trust.

What drives HOPE’s success is the dedicated commitment of Hypertherm’s

Racism of the Well-Intended: Examining Privilege and Power

On May 20, the HOPE Foundation and the Public Health Council co-hosted a workshop by Arthur Woodward and Jim Wustling called Racism of the Well-Intended. This workshop provided an in-depth look at the underlying racial tension that continues to permeate our society today. Racism of the Well-Intended has been used by community groups to serve as a model for changing relationships between people. A group of 100 local nonprofit representatives and multiple Hypertherm Associates attended this all-day workshop. Through lectures and small group exercises participants explored racism and were challenged to understand the impact of white privilege. Understanding power and its impact on relationships as well as honoring diversity in environments with minimal or no racial diversity were topics of great interest.



Jim Wustling and Art Woodward




The 2019 HOPE Foundation-hosted workshop, Racism of the Well-Intended.

associates. In 2020, during a pandemic, associates volunteered more than 20,000 hours of community service. In 2019, 85 percent of associates volunteered their time. “They all breathe life into our core value of community leadership. The depths of compassion of our associates that fuel the work is incredible,” Jenny says.

With the rise of racial justice concerns, in January of 2019 HOPE adopted the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. “We have worked diligently on improving our reflection as a grantor to be more inclusive and on how we approach the community on inclusion, diversity, and racial justice,” Jenny says. “We are thinking about what our grant application is like and what that application experience is, being more thoughtful about who is around the table at HOPE and making sure we are as inclusive and diverse as we should be.

“We still have a lot of work to do,” Jenny says. “It’s exciting. It’s a really inspiring organization and set of goals to be a part of. We welcome anyone from the community to join us and support our work.”

For more information on Hypertherm, the HOPE Foundation, and how to become a donor, visit www.hyperthermhopefoundation.org. 



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