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Corporate Philanthropy Awards 2019: Archford Capital Strategies

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Winner: Second-highest total cash giving as a percentage of revenue

Nonprofits have always been part of Jim Maher's life.

Maher, who grew up on a farm and graduated high school at the height of the 1980s farm crisis, received scholarships from nonprofits that enabled him to attend the University of Missouri. He earned two degrees and founded Swansea-based wealth management firm Archford Capital Strategies in 2013.

Maher's first son was born with a liver condition, and Maher donated a third of his liver when his son was nine months old. Grateful for the nonprofits that made the procedure possible, Maher directed Archford's corporate philanthropy toward St. Louis Children's Hospital.

But as Archford grew, Maher decided that was no longer enough. He wanted to empower his employees to support the causes they believed in.

"I just had the idea, what if we could make each person in our organization a philanthropist in their own right?" he said.



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Archford donated \$1,000 to Lutheran Senior Services so low-income seniors could attend painting workshops.

So, in 2017, Archford Angels was born. Every year, each of the firm's 18 employees receives \$1,000 to support a charity of their choice. They use the money to work with the charity to implement a specific project. Then the firm's outside advisory board votes on the best project. The winning employee earns a \$10,000 grant for his or her charity, with \$5,000 and \$2,500 awards for second and third place. The project with the most social media votes gets \$1,000. In 2018, Archford gave a total of \$76,678 to charity, accounting for 2% of the firm's \$3.8 million revenue.

This August, Archford launched a separate philanthropy initiative called Gifting Insider. Headed by Maher, the platform helps individuals and nonprofits navigate the intricacies of making and receiving charitable donations.

Meanwhile, Archford's signature Angels program is seeking copycats. The company offers a free guide on its website for any firm that wishes to launch a similar initiative. Maher said more than 60 companies have expressed interest. Two firms, including one in Wisconsin, have already implemented the program. A third, local metal recycler [Shapiro Metals](#), plans to launch its program next year. CEO [Bruce Shapiro](#) said he believes it will get his employees more involved in their community.

"The world's a bigger place than each individual company," he said. "In the world that we live in, I think it's important to work on things that are more humanistic and try to make the world a better place."

For Maher, Archford's emphasis on philanthropy is a way for him and his employees to give back to all the nonprofits that have enriched their lives — such as the foundations that gave him scholarships, the hospital that operated on his son, and the research grants and blood drives that helped make the operation successful.

"You start to see all these interrelated things that are out there that are really the nonprofit sector," Maher said. "They're carrying the weight for things we enjoy as a society that we never otherwise would've been able to enjoy."

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