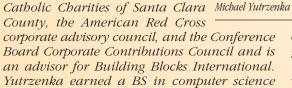# Making a Difference

Cisco's Community Focus

An Interview with Michael Yutrzenka,
Executive Director, Cisco Systems Foundation, and Director, Cisco Systems

EDITORS' NOTE *With more than 15 years' experience at Cisco in a variety of roles, Michael Yutrzenka was appointed Executive Director of the Cisco Foundation in September 2003 and has been part of Cisco's corporate philanthropy team since June 2000. Prior to joining Cisco, he was Vice President, International Sales, for Arix Corporation. Yutrzenka currently serves on the boards of directors of Network for Good and Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, the American Red Cross corporate advisory council, and the Conference Board Corporate Contributions Council and is an advisor for Building Blocks International. Yutrzenka earned a BS in computer science from the University of North Dakota.*

Michael Yutrzenka

COMPANY BRIEF *Founded in 1984 and headquartered in San Jose, California, Cisco Systems, Inc. (www.cisco.com; NASDAQ: CSCO), is a leading provider of Internet-protocol-based networking technologies, as well as of other advanced hardware, software, and service offerings for individuals, companies, and governmental entities. The company employs more than 64,000 people worldwide. The Cisco Systems Foundation was established in 1997 with a gift from Cisco Systems, Inc. The foundation provides grants to select organizations with long-lasting local or global impact.*

Is the Cisco Foundation a core component of the overall Cisco culture?

Corporate social responsibility, to a great extent, is truly part of our culture at Cisco. It started off very early, with our founders being engaged, and today it's part of the day-to-day operations of the business. It's just part of what we do, as employees and as a company.

With so many organizations that could benefit from the foundation's attention, does the foundation focus on specific activities through which it believes it can have the most impact?

We have core areas, absolutely. We look at where our core competencies can bring value, be it the networking communications aspect of what we do, the leadership aspect, or even just our overall business acumen. Our customers are more effective and more efficient in what they do through the use of Internet technology. We

want to bring that same value to the nonprofit sector and to the social responsibility activities we participate in.

How are you able to measure the success of the foundation's efforts?

Success is very important to Cisco in everything we do, and we're very much focused on measuring impact in any opportunity we engage in. Not only do we measure the rapidity with which our programs develop – how broad they become and how many people they touch – but we also look at the success of the individuals who participate in our programs – the impact we have on the community.

That said, it's difficult to measure how you change a life or a community. We do that mostly through examining compiled data and anecdotal information from the community. But we also look at what we're accomplishing on a higher level, as an organization, and how we have encouraged others to assist with particular problems through our early investments. So we also measure our success in that way.

How do you engage Cisco's employees in the foundation's initiatives?

One of the exciting things about Cisco is that our employees, to a great extent, are very self-motivated to give back. They look at us as a good company. That's one of the reasons they come to work here. However, we are always looking for ways in which we can engage our employees in the various programs we're investing in, such as our 21st Century Schools program currently in Mississippi and Louisiana. Through our leadership fellowship program, Cisco's employees can, for a portion of their careers, work 100 percent of the time on projects that make a difference out there. We make it easy for employees to support local organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, in their communities and get involved in various programs that we put together, such as our Harvest of Hope campaign, which is focused on feeding hungry people. We help them find ways to identify areas in which they have an interest and then help them get engaged.

Do you try to reach out globally?

We're looking at how we can serve the global community, particularly the underserved in emerging markets, and have an impact even before Cisco has a presence in those markets. Making investments in those communities before Cisco has a business presence there helps to

develop communities. By the time they emerge as potential business opportunities, Cisco already has a relationship in place and is recognized as a valued member of the society in those regions.

Are Cisco's C-level executives personally involved in the foundation's programs?

That is a key to our success. Cisco is very fortunate to have the kind of leadership that recognizes and stresses the importance of corporate social responsibility. Not only is it the right thing to do but it's also good for business. Our commitment to being a good citizen is seen as a valuable measure of the health of our company. Because our top-level executives are engaged in these efforts, many of our employees feel comfortable getting engaged as well. Also, many grassroots efforts start at the individual employee level of our company. So the top-down and bottom-up approaches work in tandem.

And are you personally involved in these kinds of programs?

Each of my engagements – both as a representative of Cisco and on my own time – brings me a new understanding of my community and of leadership, in a broad sense. I have grown as an individual from my work in these areas. Being personally involved makes me a part of something broader than what happens within the corporation. I'm extremely proud to be part of a company where this is important, and the fact that I can do this kind of work both outside the office and as part of my job is extremely valuable to me as an individual.

The public's perception of corporate America has been tarnished in recent years. It seems people are generally unaware of the good being done by companies like Cisco. Can more be done to get the message out?

Self-promotion is not the reason we do these things. We do it because of the value it brings to the community. However, I think corporate social responsibility initiatives will raise the visibility of corporations and our programs that impact society, in a broad sense. People are going to hear about it, are going to be proud to work for a company that has a strong culture of good corporate social responsibility, and are going to get excited about participating in one way or another – even if they don't work for the company. ●

Cisco Chairman and CEO John Chambers kicks off the annual "Harvest of Hope" campaign by sorting food with other Cisco team members at the Second Harvest Food Bank in San Jose, California