

## Making money - and a difference

By Erick Galindo Staff Writer

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You may be used to spending lots of time and money each Christmas trying to find the latest "it" gift, but Brett Ellen has an innovative idea for a Christmas gift.

"With the holidays coming up, instead of giving a toy you can give a kid 50 bucks and then you tell him he has to save some, spend some, donate some and invest some of it," said Ellen. "It teaches them how to manage money and make decisions."

Ellen, a certified financial planner with 25 years experience, is president and CEO of American Financial Network.

Ellen takes a somewhat different tack in his practice - with an emphasis on social responsibility, community involvement and teaching financial literacy at an early age.

He emphasizes a process that involves the whole family in legacy planning and preparing children early on for philanthropy, to instill core values while carefully planning for the future.

"For the older kids, you can set up retirements, Roth IRAs and teach them to invest," he said.

"You can start them off with simple stuff. Get them interested in the things they like such as iPhone or Blackberry stocks. It blows them away when you tell them they can make money anytime someone enters Disneyland."

In fact, he requests that clients bring their children to at least one financial planning meeting per year to ensure family members talk about money.

"Gifts are a good way to start the conversation," he noted. "We want to make it come

alive for the kids. It can train them on what it takes to have a good business plan."

Ellen is a frequent volunteer for schools and educational causes and has taken on the role of a kids' finance coach. Through his blog - [kidsfinancecoach.com](http://kidsfinancecoach.com) - and classroom appearances, he provides interactive programs that teach kids about money, finance and helping others.

"Save, spend, invest and donate" are the four pillars of money management that Ellen believes children must learn and practice while they are young. He likes to teach children that giving back is important, and that it is also a solid investment.

"You can take a look around you and give back to make things better," he said. "You can feel good about making a difference and then you get solid tax earnings in return."

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Ellen said he takes a sports team approach to teaching children literacy.

“Just like sports teams teach planning and the importance of perspective,” he said. “It’s great watching the light turn on and teaching respect to the kids.”

To teach his youngest sons about giving back to the community, Ellen helped them form their own non-profit organization, [turnkindnesson.org](http://turnkindnesson.org). The organization involves children in charitable work in the Los Angeles area.

“Turn Kindness On is about empowering kids to make a difference,” Ellen said. “A dollar gives 40 days of clean water. And it teaches kids that it is important that it doesn’t take a lot to make difference.”

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