



Colleagues band together to fight domestic violence and celebrate camaraderie.



# GREGORY & APPEL INSURANCE

## 'We Know We're Cared About'

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

There's an undeniable magnetism at Gregory & Appel (G&A).

It's housed in an historic building. Local artwork lines the walls. Sunlight pours into the open design.

Within it is a colorful cast of characters – hardworking, talented, jovial and close-knit. Their chemistry was palpable throughout a *BizVoice*® visit that began in a laughter-filled conference room.

Andrew Appel, president of the property and casualty department and part of the Appel legacy, reveals that in addition to interacting with co-workers, “What I like most is an intangible thing. Being employee- and family-owned and a very entrepreneurial culture, there's very few things we won't explore. ‘No’ is not an answer many people use as their first reaction.”

Founded in 1884, G&A has nearly 140 employees.

“This is our only location,” explains Chad Morris, vice president of employee benefits. “Being a 130-year old company in the insurance business and not sprawling out to several different markets is very rare. To have us all in one location is a pretty cool thing.”

Valerie Finnell, an account manager who has been with the



company for five years, conveys this sentiment: “There’s a real focus on us taking care of ourselves.”

### **Praise and parties**

Karl Ahlrichs comically peers in a window before entering the conference room.

His arrival elicits chuckles from the group.

After introducing himself, Ahlrichs adjusts his chair to a higher setting and quips, “I’m going to become more important.”

Ahlrichs, senior consultant of employee benefits, instantly responds when asked what employees love about working at G&A.

“Values alignment,” he declares. “It’s assumed everybody is smart. It’s assumed everybody can do their jobs. But (regarding) the issue of, ‘Are we working for the same purpose?’ It would be customer service. It would be solving complex problems. If insurance was simple, then simple people could do it. But it’s not simple.

“The other thing I get from the evaluations is ethics and integrity. It’s so refreshing to work somewhere where it’s easy to make a decision because you just do the right thing. You do the right thing for the customer.”

The company also “does the right thing” for its workforce. Perks range from an annual Employee Appreciation Day and holiday party to profit sharing and quarterly massages.

“We’ve had people leave and come back. It’s like, ‘Oh my gosh! You won’t believe what it’s like over there! They don’t have massages,’” Ahlrichs recounts in mock horror.

Account Manager Jenny Pochler relishes summer hours.

“We leave early, which is nice, but we’re still going to get our

work done,” she stresses. “I’m not going to leave my desk with a pile of work and say, ‘To heck with it. I’m off early.’ Nobody does that. (The policy) encourages the culture, the family. You’re going to do the right thing.”

Pochler also enjoys serving on the planning committee for the annual holiday party, an off-site event with a different theme each year.

“As soon as we’re done, I’m so excited to plan it again. It’s so much fun!” she remarks.

Lakisa Skinner, commercial service associate, seconds that.

“Last year, we had a magic show. The magician was awesome,” she marvels. “People raved about him. He walked around doing all kinds of tricks and had people in awe throughout the night.”

Smiling, director of marketing Erika Cuadrado cites “another nice touch. You go to your table and you’re greeted not only by this beautiful setting, but a nice holiday bonus too.”

The theme is confidential until guests arrive. So are the seating arrangements.

“I appreciate that,” Morris asserts. “It gets you out of your cliques. We’re spread out over two floors (at G&A). Chances are, there is somebody here you don’t know very well, so that’s a great opportunity for that.”

Through peer nomination, each planning committee member received a GREAT award. Accolades include having their photo taken and displayed on a television in the office lobby, a \$50 gift card and a traveling trophy.

“It was awesome because everyone in the office recognized the hard work we put in to do this,” Skinner notes, clearly touched. “We



A quartet is hard at work installing siding and a sense of pride.

have a nice dinner, dancing. It's a fun night to share with our co-workers."

### Pursuing philanthropy

Community service spans a multitude of causes.

A faithful participant in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure to combat breast cancer, G&A was one of the top five

fundraising teams in central Indiana in 2016.

The group also recalls a sweltering, but gratifying day helping to build a house with Habitat for Humanity.

"I got to use a nail gun!" Liz Burnell, commercial service associate, imparts to the delight of her colleagues.

She supports the United Way of Central Indiana by taking part in its ReadUp program.

Once or twice a month, she spends her lunch hour reading to third graders at an Indianapolis Public School.

"I've been with these kids for the entire school year – and you can see the change!" she proclaims, putting her hand over her heart for emphasis. "You're with the same two kids the entire time."

Finnell describes how Appel turned his designation to the *Indianapolis Business Journal* Forty Under 40 list (honors notable achievements in the workplace and community) into an opportunity to give back.

"He asked us to give a list of things we contribute to and are passionate about," she divulges. "He chose 40 of those and gave \$100 (toward each). Our company matched that. G&A gave \$8,000 to 40 different causes. That type of thing – it's something they do that lets us know we're cared about."

She can't help but grin remembering the occasion. It was Valentine's Day and Appel serenaded the crowd at a Taco Tuesday employee appreciation lunch.

"He wore a heart while he strummed on a guitar. It was ridiculous."

She savored every moment.

### Moving in and moving up

G&A is ardently addressing the insurance industry's talent shortage.



Employees bask in the grandeur at Gregory & Appel's annual holiday party.

“People don’t necessarily go to college and think, ‘I’m going to go into insurance,’” Cuadrado affirms. “They don’t realize, maybe, how robust an industry it is or how lucrative it can be. So, it’s important for us to share with our youth what a career in insurance can be and what the potential is.”

Another aspect involves diversity and inclusion.

“We want to make sure we’re sharing the opportunity of our industry with everyone. That’s critical for us not only as an organization, but as an industry,” Cuadrado emphasizes. “That’s a top priority.”

Morris interjects, “That’s not an easy task. There’s not a lot of diversity in the insurance business, especially in central Indiana. We’re making major efforts there for sure.”

G&A advances a culture that “encourages us to better ourselves,” Finnell asserts. “They give us financial incentives to do that if we want to take some classes or try to further our degree.”

Burnell, who started as an intern last June, agrees.

“I can attest to that,” she remarks. “Lakisa and I are service associates and we’re both in training right now to become account managers.”

Skinner admires staff who step in to act as mentors.

“We have a lot of co-workers who are very good trainers,” she comments. “They’re very knowledgeable about a lot of things. They’re very good resources when it comes to learning how to do things because things (in the industry) change so much.”

## Run with it

On a brief office tour, G&A’s commitment to wellness comes to light. An initial stop is Cuadrado’s work area, which is equipped with a standing desk.

“I usually stand all day. I don’t like sitting,” she confides. “A standing desk is available to anyone who wants one.”

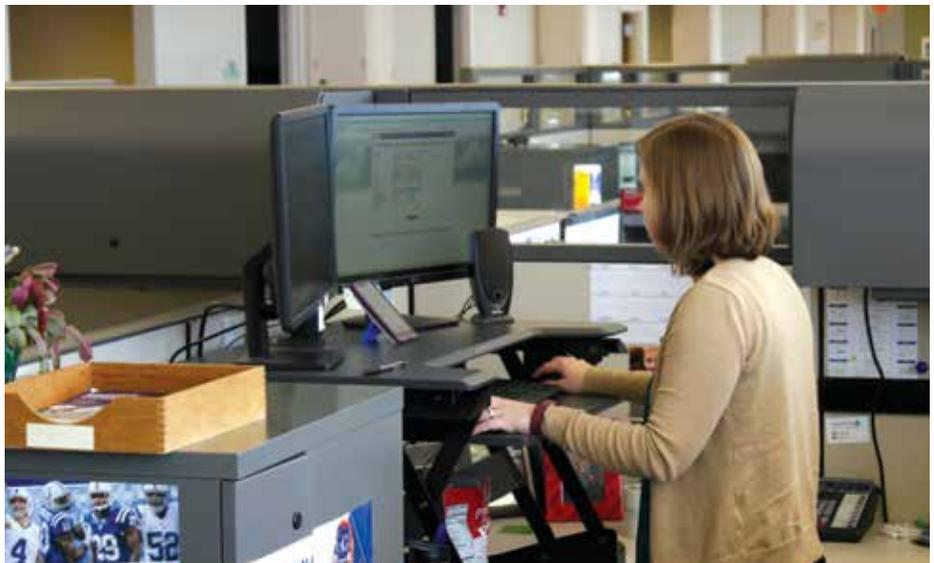
Nearby, a tread desk awaits its next user. Also close by is a health station, where people can check their weight, blood pressure and more.

“This is tied into our Virgin Pulse program,” Cuadrado explains. “Let’s say, for example, I have a healthy weight, lost weight or had good blood pressure. Every month, you can earn points for that. When you get to a certain amount of points, you get money!”

Employees can earn up to \$500 annually.

Seconds later, she opens the door to an exercise room featuring locker rooms and showers.

“This gets pretty busy either in the



Stand and deliver. Account manager Jenny Poehler (top) and director of marketing Erika Cuadrado multitask.



morning, lunch hour or end of day,” Cuadrado discloses. “People will do all of their work and by 3, they’ll be working out for the rest of the day or they’ll go out and run. I love that we’re so close to the canal. We go out a lot.”

She mentions as we reach the café that vending machines were replaced with a second refrigerator (shortly before she joined G&A a year ago) as part of its wellness initiative.

“Oh, this is fun!” she exclaims as something catches her eye. It’s a huge piece of cardboard decorated with vibrant photos of employees.

“There’s a really big running culture

here. Every year, we have a ‘fun run.’ You can run or walk. Afterwards, they meet at (at a restaurant). Last year, it was a burger house. We usually do it the day of the holiday party.

“Somebody puts these (mementos) together. It’s a fun little thing we do.”

The holiday party evokes one of Poehler’s heartfelt reflections earlier in the day: “Usually when we come to the end of the year, there’s a lot of exciting and fun things we get to look forward to. It’s kind of surreal at times. I’m like, ‘What could we do better?’ I can’t imagine a better workplace. You just feel like, ‘Gosh, how’d I get here? I’m so lucky to be here.’ ”