

Here to Serve

Nonprofits ‘Give Back’ to Community, Employees

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Beach Boys tunes fill the air on a winter afternoon and an employee playfully holds a “Florida or Bust” sign at a beach-themed office party.

Elsewhere, chatter dies down as a staff meeting begins. Soon, managers eagerly announce winners of monthly peer recognition awards.

At a prestigious ceremony, an employee proudly accepts an award for making the most positive impact on this organization during the past year.

More than 400 people – including staff members, friends and family members – gather for an annual celebration to honor people who donated organs and tissues to save others’ lives.

For a group of Hoosier nonprofits on this year’s Best Places to Work in Indiana list, a commitment to serving others carries over into the workplace. Despite varied missions, they share a passion for enhancing the lives of others – both within the community and internally. Recruiting workers who possess that same dedication has proven to be a powerful combination in creating dynamic workplaces.

The honorees featured here:

- National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC)
- Hospice of the Wabash Valley and Visiting Nurse Association
- United Way of Central Indiana
- Indiana Organ Procurement Organization (IOPO)

Fun for fourth graders! IOPO staff volunteers help teach children how the body works and the importance of good health at “Life is Cool” events.



“One of the questions I ask employees once a year is, ‘What makes you stay?’ And very often, I’ll get a comment from someone who says, ‘I could work anywhere doing the same thing, but at the end of a tough day, I could say (that by working at United Way of Central Indiana), I made a difference,’” reveals Nancy Ahlrichs, vice president of workforce development and diversity.

More than a paycheck

Headquartered in Indianapolis, IOPO also has a presence in Evansville, Fort Wayne and South Bend.

Sam Davis, director of professional services and public affairs, acknowledges that the nature of the positions can be challenging, but says that’s part of the appeal.

“People are drawn to this particular field of health care because the work is unique,” he observes. “When you have recipients of organs and tissues saying, ‘The work you do saved my life (or) made a difference in my life,’ those are the things that have a lot of reward professionally and personally.

They don’t have anything to do with benefits or salary.”

NAMIC, which serves the property/casualty insurance industry, operates locally in Indianapolis.

Michael Ulmer, vice president of operations, stresses that employees with a strong work ethic and service-oriented mindset are doubly valuable.

“We look for people who have the intrinsic drive to serve others – people who routinely go above and beyond just because that’s who they are,” he remarks. “Attracting and retaining that type of person has the dual effect of enabling the association to provide exceptional service to its members and creating a workplace where people enjoy serving and working with each other.”

In return, these four nonprofits promote a warm atmosphere to express employee

appreciation.

"The work we do is pretty intense. We have to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That creates some stresses and long hours for our staff, and we want to make sure we support them as best we can," Davis comments.

IOPO's corporate culture committee, for example, plans company-wide outings (ice cream socials, chili cook-offs, etc.) and sports gatherings. In addition, employees receive gift cards to local restaurants to celebrate their birthdays.

Sometimes all it takes to boost employee morale is a simple 'thank you.'

The Hospice of the Wabash Valley and Visiting Nurse Association, located in Terre Haute, solicits staff feedback through its "Way to Go" program. Individuals submit "coupons" recognizing peers for outstanding contributions. Four winners are chosen via a drawing at monthly staff meetings and receive a gift certificate for lunch. Managers give handwritten notes of thanks.

NAMIC celebrates milestone service anniversaries, starting at five years. Recipients are treated to lunch by a manager and presented with a gift card (amounts vary based on length of service). Veterans who have been with the company at least 15 years are recognized with an in-house reception. All honorees receive a personalized framed certificate at the company's annual holiday party.

Spreading goodwill

Employees at all four nonprofits find gratification in supporting a variety of community service organizations and programs.

Employees at the IOPO, for instance, can donate a portion of their paycheck to charity. One popular benefactor is the Hoosier Burn Camp, which provides a place to interact for children ages eight to 18 with burn injuries.

"That's our way of giving back. We try to find things that are meaningful to staff members and the work we do," Davis states.

Kim Streeter, human resource information systems director at the Hospice of the Wabash Valley and Visiting Nurse Association, estimates that her colleagues have raised nearly \$8,000 over the past 18 months for the community. Focuses included a feline



NAMIC employees spend a relaxing afternoon playing games at a carnival-themed lunch outing.

rescue, food drive and breast cancer awareness efforts.

"It's amazing how it's added up," she declares. "Every month, staff is asking, 'How much did we raise this month?' They're really reaching out to the community."

The United Way mission is to support more than 100 human service agencies. NAMIC has been named an "Employer That Cares" by the United Way based on employee participation in payroll deduction programs.

Common, unique challenge

Ahlrichs describes a major difference between for-profit businesses and nonprofits.

"I think with for-profits, the bottom line is financial," she contends. "They have to have sound financial stewardship and a committed, effective workforce and certainly we do, too, (but) we have an additional bottom line: We not only have to meet our financial goals – clearly we do – but our bottom line is really human outcomes.

"We're looking at so many changes in how we do things, whether it's technology changes or how donor corporations want us to communicate with them. We need people – and we have them – who are very open to change and helping each other because that's the only way we're going to get things done."

One challenge comes with the proverbial territory of being a small organization.

"In health care at least, the for-profits are (spread) across the United States and have many branches," offers Trudy Rupska, vice president and chief operating officer at the Hospice of the Wabash Valley and Visiting Nurse Association. "They have a marketing department with really cool things (that can be turned around) in a quick way that's standardized for everyone. Our resources are perhaps more limited, in our business at least."

She emphasizes, however, that the organization has turned one challenge – communicating with staff members (most travel throughout the day) – into an opportunity.



Staff at Hospice of the Wabash Valley & Visiting Nurse Association proudly wear colorful ribbons in support of the "Orange Friday" campaign, which provides meals to people in need.



United Way of Central Indiana staff members Judith Rosario (left) and Justine Young (center) tackle yard work with other volunteers during a United Way Day of Caring.

“We’re very into electronics around here,” Rupska shares. “Our use of technology puts us ahead of our competitors, I do believe. Our staff all has laptops. We are constantly working on upgrading our phones for our staff. We just put all of our nursing staff on Blackberries.”

She cites a sophisticated home monitoring system (it tracks vital medical information and sends it back to the office for nurses to review) as another example.

There’s no doubt that nonprofits face unique obstacles, but along with for-profit businesses, one of the biggest is competition.

Ulmer asserts, “Any business that provides business to any other business faces competition. Our members renew their dues each year by choice, so we have to continually provide a tangible value to get that renewal.”

Davis points out, “We know that to attract and retain the best employees, we have to attempt a working environment that is as high of a standard and competitive with for-profits because the skills our employees have are transferrable to the for-profit community.”

Rupska sums it up: “The thing I think is important is that to develop a culture and keep it going takes dedication, and you cannot drop the ball ever. It’s an ongoing commitment. We certainly haven’t had the great culture we have now all the time. But, we’ve been working on it for three or four years and it pays off.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Trudy Rupska and Kim Streeter, Hospice of the Wabash Valley and Visiting Nurse Association, at myhospicevna.org

Sam Davis, Indiana Organ Procurement Organization, at www.iopo.org

Michael Ulmer, National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies, at www.namic.org

Nancy Ahlrichs, United Way of Central Indiana, at www.uwci.org



Small word, big difference.

Thousands in Indiana wait for a life-saving transplant. And although millions of Hoosiers have already said yes to organ and tissue donation it’s still not enough. Your business can help us share information with your employees or community to help them make this important decision, too. Please email us at community@iopo.org and say, “YES we’ll help.”

IOPO

INDIANA ORGAN PROCUREMENT ORGANIZATION

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