

# SECRET SAUCE

## Recurring Honorees Stir Up Recipe for Success

By Matt Ottinger



In 2014, Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company's mission team partnered with Jacob's Ladder Community Development Corporation, which is working to improve the living conditions in a low-rent, high-crime neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee. The company's staff is now lighter as well, as it lost a collective 492 pounds during the Smallest Winner contest.

The Best Places to Work (BPTW) in Indiana list has been unveiled with much anticipation for the past 10 years. While hundreds of organizations have been honored in that time, only a handful have the distinction of being named in at least eight of those years.

*BizVoice*<sup>®</sup> spoke to several of these companies to glean their approaches that warrant consistent high marks from their employees.

Great health benefits. Fair or above average compensation. Wellness programs. A safe environment in manufacturing facilities. These all tend to be highlights of top-tier companies. Additionally, culture is often king when it comes to a Best Places designation.

"We're bringing in a Culture Club, which will spread our culture to our other markets," explains Chrisanne Christ, senior partner of human resource development at Centier, which spans across Northern Indiana and recently expanded to the Indianapolis area. "We have about 350 associates in Merrillville, so it's easier to offer amenities when you have a big campus. But we're not always able to bring the things to a smaller branch, so the Culture Club will help with that."

Loyalty is also a unifying force as some companies turned the challenges of the economic downturn of 2008 into a building point.



“We put our associates and clients first. Even more than shareholders and senior management. Not just having that as a visual, but living that is why people stay here,” Christ points out. “We are a family, and even when times are difficult like back in 2008, we didn’t lay anybody off. When families go through tough times, you don’t kick people out of the family; you work on what you need to work on and get through it.”

### Health, hope and faith

Workers in cohesive companies also tend to share common interests and passions.

Take the law firm of Hall Render Killian Heath & Lyman. Initially founded in Indianapolis, where over 220 people are employed, Hall Render now boasts seven locations across the country. While many law firms are varied in the types of law they practice, Hall Render focuses exclusively on issues facing health care organizations. It’s that common thread that John Ryan, president and managing partner, believes binds his staff together.

“We are all passionate about supporting better health care, and our law firm is focused on providing legal and consulting services to the health care industry,” he explains, adding that virtually everyone employed at Hall Render has a previous connection to the field. “Maybe they were a nurse who became an attorney, or served in an administration capacity in health care. Through that common thread is an opportunity to have a great workplace.”

He adds that it’s not only a unified goal, but that knowledge of the industry allows the company to think differently about the health care it affords its staff.

“We’ve always had a benefit package that aligns more closely with the benefit offerings you’d see in health care, as opposed to what

you’d see in other law firms,” Ryan distinguishes. “When we interview people from those firms, that’s mentioned as quite a value-add. And as health care has focused more acutely on wellness, that has become a priority for us as well, so we have a strong wellness program.”

Fort Wayne’s Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company is nearing its 100th anniversary (in 2017), and chairman and president Mark Robison looks forward to celebrating that remarkable milestone with his over 360 employees. And like Hall Render, Brotherhood Mutual serves a specific niche, which in this case is insuring churches and related ministries.

“Our customers are faith-based,” Robison notes. “As a company that serves them, we want to serve churches really well. Many of our employees are in church and want to help churches, so it really helps when you can tie your mission to your own personal passions.”

That dedication also reveals itself in the manner in which the company helps its employees serve their respective faiths.

“For amenities, we’re unique in that we offer ministry support for those who want to go on a short-term mission trip – for both the employee and/or their family,” he discloses. “So if their kids are in high school and want to go on a mission trip to Haiti, we’ll pay for half the cost of that trip up to \$750 every other year.”

Brotherhood Mutual also helps its workers’ families by guaranteeing employment to all of its employees’ college-age children for a period of time (40 hours per week for six to 12 weeks, starting at a salary of \$10 per hour).

Fusion Alliance, based in Indianapolis, is a hybrid of a digital agency, mobile solutions provider and technology consulting firm. CEO Doug Brown raves about the acumen of his staff and strives to serve the unique aspirations of the IT minds that have made Fusion such a success.



Centier Bank associates display their pride at the bank’s annual Celebration of Excellence event, where staff members are recognized for their achievements, and president and CEO Mike Schrage gives hearty high fives to colleagues for their efforts. Community events like block parties also get associates involved in the areas they serve.

Camaraderie was in high gear at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway last September during Hall Render's annual attorney retreat.



“IT professionals want to work for leadership they trust and in a foundational culture of trust, integrity and learning,” he clarifies. “Certainly IT professionals want to learn and earn career enhancing opportunities – and work with other talented IT professionals and the opportunity to make a difference for our company and our customers. Compensation and benefits is really secondary to all of that; they’re more about the work and the culture of the firm and the direction the company’s headed.”

**Learn from the best**

Another notable commonality is that each of these companies pays close attention to both internal survey results and to what other honorees are offering.

“When you keep winning, it makes it a little harder to improve, but we heard (at a previous awards dinner) that one company had a great adoption benefit,” Robison relays. “We looked at ours and realized it was pretty basic. And a few of our employees requested (we

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address it). So we did implement the adoption benefit – and the number of employees that adopt inside our building is incredible.”

Robison explains that the company now gives money for adoption – international or domestic – and parents can spread out those expenses.

“It’s not just when the adoption is completed that you get the money, because so much cost takes place during the process – so we release some money at different stages of the process,” he says.

Hall Render officials liked what they heard when made aware that some companies combined their sick leave and vacation days into one combined paid time off policy, so that is now implemented at the firm. Furthermore, a recognition program for long-time employees was also deemed an appealing idea.

“We now have a 10-year club that’s inclusive of every employee who’s been here for 10 years or more,” Ryan expresses. “We saw another employer doing that ... and now we offer a one-week vacation raffle to everybody in the 10-year club. Once a year we do this raffle at the 10-year club reception

to provide to a club member and a guest; that raffle has become a very big deal.”

At Centier, the Best Places surveys revealed “a disconnect,” conveying that some employees were unaware of all the amenities offered.

“So now we have an annual benefit booklet because we have associates who stay here for their entire careers in many cases, and their lives change over time,” Christ states. “Maybe they started out with young kids, and now they have elderly parents. We also ask if there are benefits they would like to see.”

### Shout it out

Winning companies also parlay their accolades into a recruitment tool.

“We find people look at that (list), and we find Fusion has a strong name and brand in the marketplace for employees,” Brown asserts. “I’ve had multiple people tell me that list is one place they look, and it caused them to reach out to us.”

At Hall Render, applicants find the Best Places designation online and elsewhere.

“We prominently display the Best Places

recognition on our web site, and have received similar honors for our offices in other states,” Ryan remarks. “Our applicants often mention that, and it’s been a great opportunity for us to open dialog in the context of those interviews with respect to our culture and mission.”

Ryan adds that most of Hall Render’s hires stem from employee referrals.

“It’s rare for us to hire someone in our firm who doesn’t have an existing connection, and we see that as a compliment to the firm – that our employees refer us to people they know.”

More than the award, however, it’s the sentiment and substance behind it that helps these companies continue to build with top talent.

“We love sharing the story,” Christ concludes. “It’s not just the accolades; it’s that our associates feel this way because it’s largely based on employee surveys. We want like-minded people applying here who want to work for a Best Places company, because we feel they’ll make us even stronger.”

**RESOURCES:** Doug Brown, Fusion Alliance, at [www.fusionalliance.com](http://www.fusionalliance.com) | Chrisanne Christ, Centier, at [www.centier.com](http://www.centier.com) | Mark Robison, Brotherhood Mutual, at [www.brotherhoodmutual.com](http://www.brotherhoodmutual.com) | John Ryan, Hall Render, at [www.hallrender.com](http://www.hallrender.com)



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