

ENTERTAINING AND ESCAPING

Employees Enjoy Unique Opportunities

By Rebecca Patrick

Emmis Communications, Horseshoe Casino Hammond and RCI have more in common than once again making the Best Places to Work in Indiana list. Each in its own way provides escapes for their customers, while their employees thrive in the culture and on the connection to the people they serve.



Emmis raised over \$11,000 in the Ice Bucket Challenge to douse the CEO and president of programming in honor of former employee Matt White who has ALS. Company camaraderie, friendly competition and exercise all mix together for Emmis at the 2014 Indiana Sports Corp Corporate Challenge.

Emmis Communications

Founded 35 years ago by Jeff Smulyan, Emmis boasts 25 radio stations in select markets across the nation, including in Indianapolis (corporate headquarters), Boston, Los Angeles and New York.

“The idea is that we attract people that we think have a real passion for what we do. And it’s our job to prepare them for the future,” Smulyan affirms.

One way Emmis is doing that is through a formalized mentoring program called Emerging Leaders.

“It’s about identifying people who are high potential. They may not be a manager currently, but we think they would be a really good fit in our culture and a good manager (down the road),” explains Traci Thomson, vice president of HR, who created the effort three years ago.

Charlie Morgan, senior vice president for Emmis’ Indianapolis market, is one of the mentors.

“We spend time with them individually and as a group. We also offer some outside development, and we give them a project that actually becomes a part of how the company operates – so it’s not just an exercise but has a real legacy.”

Adds Thomson, “We’ve had some really good outcomes from that program. Personally, I have had the opportunity to grow into different positions. It’s very much a culture here of, ‘We have faith that you can do it, so we will give you the opportunity.’”

Spurring successful collaborations

The belief that “everybody has a stake” in things, as Morgan puts it, is a reflection of Smulyan’s conscious efforts.

“It’s a very collaborative company. It’s not a company where you see autocratic behavior. So people buy into that, and it’s a culture that challenges everybody to come to the table with ideas and innovations,” Smulyan describes.

Those coming to the table are on the front lines and mid-level managers in addition to top executives.

“There’s a tremendous involvement level and openness,” Morgan mentions. “The top manager still has the responsibility of making the decisions, but the willingness to seek out feedback and input from all parts of the operation is noticeably

different here and much more frequent than other places I've been."

On top of that, Morgan stresses that Emmis equally "works hard to celebrate" ratings and revenue milestones. That takes the form of personal notes of thanks to formal recognition dinners where employees get to hear management "brag about them" in front of their loved ones.

Employees are able to reach those goals, says Bob Parrish, general sales manager at Emmis-Terre Haute, "because Emmis still provides the tools to help win – in all its markets. Part of that arsenal is people; they want to find the best people possible for every position, and they don't spare any expense to do that."

Nothing like it

Several employees remarked that being part of a company that is an industry leader, especially in innovation, makes it an exciting place to be.

"While I'm in technology, which is typically an IT role, I don't just work with computers. I get to work with radio technology," enthuses Adrienne Wright, vice president of technology.

That includes work on the NextRadio software. NextRadio is the idea of turning the FM chips on in smart phones.

"It's starting to sweep the country," Smulyan contends. "I think if we're successful, you will see it in every smartphone and dashboard in the United States."

Concludes Morgan: "For me, a well-run radio group like Emmis is the best kind of work environment. You can't predict the routine because we are literally creating content in real-time; you just don't know what the day is going to bring and what you are going to react to.

"This level of energy, collaboration and creativity I have found impossible to match anywhere else. It's special."

Horseshoe Casino Hammond

Approximately 2,000 people work at Horseshoe Casino in Hammond. Because the operation never closes, it presents both unique opportunities and challenges with employee satisfaction and engagement.

Within the last year, Horseshoe rolled out its own on-site wellness center with a nurse practitioner. Many other efforts also address a work/life balance and making things more convenient for workers.

Market Day once a month features food vendors on-site with good prices. The employee dining hall has a discounted menu; for \$3, you receive an entrée/sandwich, two sides, soup and a salad. Both allow for payment via payroll deduction.

Horseshoe is also there during the most

emotional, challenging times.

Last year, Joan Bish's stepfather unexpectedly passed away without any death benefits or insurance. The Lifeboat Fund came to the rescue. Bish, a marine operations supervisor, applied for and received a one-time hardship grant that she won't have to pay back.

"(Horseshoe) handled everything with the funeral home and made sure they got paid. It speaks volumes; I can't fully put it into words," she shares.

Setting itself apart

Turnover in the gaming industry is high, but it's half the national average at Horseshoe and parent Caesars Entertainment.

When it comes to hiring, Horseshoe looks for a certain kind of individual. One that is not only passionate but outgoing to interact with customers.

For Qiana Sanders, a poker dealer, that

means she gets to be herself.

"It's very important for me to be able every day to maintain my happiness. I'm always determined to have a great day. And Horseshoe actually wants their employees to be happy and smiling all the time."

Education reimbursement and various programs for career advancement exist and rank highly with staff. Horseshoe often hires from within and fosters exploration and promotional paths for those demonstrating the willingness and leadership skills.

"People don't necessarily grow up thinking they want to spend a career in the casino business, so for many of our employees this starts out as being a job and ultimately, over time, it does transition to becoming a career," explains Horseshoe Regional President Dan Nita. "There are no real defined career paths like you would find at a more highly-structured organization."

He is particularly proud that despite the



Once a quarter, Horseshoe Casino executives work the graveyard shift and serves employees a made-to-order breakfast. A summer movie night featured a large, on-site projection screen for employees and their families to watch *The Lego Movie*, plus a concession stand with free soft drinks and hot dogs.

industry unevenness the past year, the company “maintained an esprit de corps that our employees are excited to still be here.”

Fun and rewards

The casino’s mission of inspiring grown-ups to play spills over to the workplace culture.

“We work really hard but we have a great sense of fun. From the executives all the way down, we are not afraid to make fun of ourselves, to dress up, to do silly things. That aspect of it is something I really admire,” praises Dawn Reynolds-Pettit, regional vice president.

This year, Horseshoe is doing monthly Olympic events that feature, among other activities, trivia, basketball, volleyball and darts. Besides being fun, it builds rapport among departments says Patrick MacFarlane, director of cage operations.

Meanwhile, the Total Return Program rewards employees for good actions such as participating in a charity event, having perfect attendance or having a great manager observation. Employees receive credits, which they can use for shopping at an online store. The more credits you accrue, the greater your prize can be. Items range from a wine glass to Tiffany jewelry to large appliances or even vacations.

Horseshoe also goes out of its way to give back to the community through its HERO program; it keeps employees informed with options and makes it easy for them to take part.

Vanessa DeRousseau, internal communications specialist, believes going the extra mile with volunteerism is much appreciated: “That’s important to a lot of our employees, getting out there and doing what’s right.”

RCI

Recognized as the pioneer in the time-share exchange concept for vacation homes, RCI represents about 4,000 properties all over the world. Each year, the company “does literally a couple million exchanges for members,” offers Richard Ruff, senior vice president.

Founded in Indianapolis in 1974, RCI was sold two decades later and today is part of the Wyndham Worldwide Corporation.

RCI maintains a large operation locally, headed by the contact center that interacts with members from all over the country.

Making a difference

Ruff says fulfilling the dreams, so to speak, of so many customers positively “touches employees in a lot of different ways.”

RCI gets daily feedback from members telling employees how much a vacation meant to them.

“Whether that was with a family reunion, an anniversary celebration or a special trip with the family that they are taking due to a life-threatening illness, it’s really heartwarming and gives me goosebumps to read some of the stories,” shares Stephanie Brammell, director of human resources.

One of RCI’s founders was Christel DeHaan, a noted philanthropist who herself continues to make a real difference with the Christel House and Christel Centers around the globe. Her giving mindset remains an integral part of the company’s fabric.

RCI’s Wish Day allows each employee to take a day off work with pay to support a charity that’s important to them. They may do something on their own or take part in an organized RCI effort.

A charity of choice program also encourages employees to donate a portion of their pay to RCI’s designated organizations. Over 50% of staff participate.

Perks and policies

While all RCI staff receive annual resort vacations (based on tenure) and a \$350 travel allowance, it’s the culture – one that puts a special emphasis on diversity – that resonates for many.

“We take a lot of pride in that. You can hear, see and feel that diversity every single day,” states Terry Motsenbocker, CFO for North America. “It goes back to one of our core values of respect everyone, everywhere.”

RCI has established associate business groups that represent the African-American, Hispanic and LGBT communities.

Product manager Beverly Davis is heavily involved in the Spectrum group for African-Americans.



RCI celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2014. “The amazing culture this organization has (maintained) – from transforming from a privately-held organization started by individuals to a publicly-traded company – has been just phenomenal,” raves HR director Stephanie Brammell.

“We are very happy to showcase some of our cultural experiences and beliefs with some of the other associates. And that brings us closer together,” she begins.

“Participants are all across the board and we are achieving what we set out to achieve, which is being able to show that we are much more alike than different. And that we can appreciate whatever those differences are.”

Career and personal development

Opportunity is another integral aspect at RCI, and it takes on many forms for learning and advancement.

“They actually provide real-life experience with business travel. You get to learn about the properties. I’m getting ready to leave on the Global Guide Exchange program for five weeks in Mexico City to

learn about the RCI office in Latin America (she’s also been to the Dominican Republic twice). That just doesn’t happen anywhere else,” insists vacation guide Sandra Lowe.

A mentor match on the web site allows employees to sign up for the area or skills they are interested in. Ruff is currently mentoring a worker in Scotland.

Interested employees also can test the waters in another division.

“I have over 20 staff on loan in various capacities around the business either for a special project or for a career-expanding opportunity to work in a different group,” Ruff describes. “It opens the door and gives them an opportunity (for something new).”

Davis concludes, “RCI is willing to really invest in us not only for RCI’s benefit but for our personal benefit. That’s a big deal.”

RESOURCES: Emmis Communications at www.emmis.com | Horseshoe Casino Hammond at www.caesars.com/horseshoe-hammond | RCI at www.rci.com